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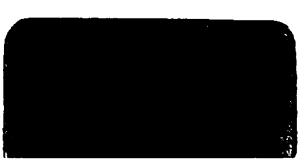

MISS LANGLEY'S WILL

VOL. I

RIVINGTONS

London ... ... *Waterloo Place*
Oxford ... ... *High Street*
Cambridge ... ... *Trinity Street*

MISS LANGLEY'S WILL

A Tale

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

RIVINGTONS
London, Oxford, and Cambridge
1869

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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

ON a bright, soft morning at that season when verdure is most freshly vivid, and sheltered bank and sunny mead each hour yield a richer floral spoil, a little girl, about nine years old, was seated on the margin of a brook, busily occupied in arranging the abundance she had gathered. So deeply was her attention engrossed that she was not for some time aware of being the object of the earnest gaze of one about her own age, who, mounted on a pretty Shetland pony, had been pursuing her way on a road running along the higher ground, at a short distance. The stranger was alone, her steed being so perfectly docile as to

be safely entrusted to her own management. Once descried, she awakened no less curiosity in the child below, who, hastily throwing aside a half-wreathed garland, at once ran up the bank which bounded the road. Childhood needs not much formality of introduction: names exchanged—"Catherine Mansfield," "Maria Rashleigh"—a familiar dialogue immediately began.

"This is Magnus, my new pony," said the latter-named speaker; "don't you admire him?"

"Oh, yes, he *is* a beauty! I long to pat him," answered Catherine, and in her eagerness to accomplish this impracticable object she had nearly slipped headlong from her station on the bank.

"Have you a pony?" was the next inquiry.

"Oh, no!" with a look of wonder at the thought.

"Then, I suppose, you have a donkey?"

Another almost equally emphatic negative.

"Why then," pursued the little querist, "how do you ever ride?"

"I never do ride."

This avowal excited Maria's unfeigned compassion: in the pride and delight of her acquisition, riding seemed to her almost an indispensable con-

dition of existence. But Magnus, though by far the most highly prized, was but one of many gifts from the same bountiful hand, that of Miss Langley, the owner of Beechwood Manor, the large and beautiful domain within whose bounds they were. With eager wonder did the child, whose richest treasures lay on the greensward beneath, hear of various toys provided for indoor amusement, of a complete set of gardening tools, &c., and, above all, of many, many books, "so amusing!" Telling and listening so beguiled the time that both were startled by the striking of a church clock. Thus admonished, Maria could linger no more. With a happy smile and friendly nod, she put Magnus again in motion; while Catherine, having gazed till she was quite beyond sight, ran homewards in breathless haste, as if she feared to be deprived of the bliss of recounting what she had seen and heard.

In this simple incident originated a friendship which grew by natural, easy progress, unmarked by any peculiar circumstance. But ten years after this first meeting they entered, each on the same night, on a new era of life.

Late in the evening of a gloomy day in March, the lodge-gates of Beechwood were thrown open to admit the carriage of Dr. Percival, a physician high in practice in that neighbourhood.

"Which way, sir?" asked the servant who was driving.

"The Old Manor," was the reply; and the lower road, encircling the whole estate, was followed accordingly. That hour was not one fully to display the beauties of Beechwood. The vernal equinox had seldom brought a greater force of tempest:—

"The woods
Roar'd with strong winds, with mighty showers the floods."

Traces of a recent and violent storm were every where visible; large branches, lately torn from the high o'er-arching trees, strewed the road, requiring much caution on the driver's part. But his master took no heed of the obstacles in the path; he never once looked down, though a jolt was of no infrequent occurrence. Professional life had accustomed him to witness the joys and woes of humanity in every vicissitude of season and weather, yet he found himself impressed by the

desolation around him, as being strikingly congenial with the duty on which he was bound, and its effect on his own mind. He had been much interested in the case, and knew that his attendance could not be long required. Looking straight onwards, he watched intently for one particular object—would it be yet visible? It was, he discerned from afar, and kept in view, the accustomed gleam of a solitary taper. The so-styled Old Manor House was but the picturesque fragment of an Elizabethan erection. Nothing remained of the ancient pile but the eastern gable, and hardly a remnant of the ample enclosure once surrounding it. A few broken stones alone marked the limits of the former courtyard: the way lay open to all comers, whether by horse or foot. The light equipage which now approached made but little noise on a soil moistened by recent rains, but it was not unheard: attentive ears expected the sound; it would bring kind sympathy at least. The physician's hand was hardly on the door when it was opened, not by the ancient servant: a lighter step left hers behind. Wan now with oppressing fears and long-continued watching, the

countenance of Catherine Mansfield possessed at no time other attractions than a marked expression of intelligence and gentleness. With hardly any greeting but a look of cordial regard, she glided before Dr. Percival. The latter, as he trod the chill, unmatted floor, and felt the draughts which whistled on all sides, shook his head significantly.

"Ah!" thought he; "all this, year after year, was enough to do the work; but that poor girl must not know it."

The apartment to which he was conducted corresponded with the general desolation of the dwelling, betokening unmistakably the narrow means of the inhabitants. The furniture, though arranged with perfect order, was humble and scanty. Little was said by any of the three then present. The first glance at his patient assured Dr. Percival of what his experience had foretold, that this visit would be the last. Catherine, reading the truth in his countenance, turned away in silent anguish: his eyes followed her in true compassion. The dying woman was not unobservant of either. Peaceful in spirit, but utterly exhausted in frame, she made then her only effort at speech.

"The kind Rashleighs, at first," she said to Dr. Percival, in a voice low, but distinct.

He understood her meaning, answered by a look of satisfaction, an earnest, solemn pressure of the hand, and withdrew.

These whom he quitted were not mother and child. Mrs. Mansfield had incurred the displeasure of wealthy relatives by marrying an officer who had nothing wherewith to endow her but his pay. He soon fell in action, but as she was, remarked her sister Philippa Trevor, "most providentially left without incumbrances," she might, it was considered, live in tolerable comfort on her pension. This advantage she recklessly threw away. A cousin of her husband caught a fatal distemper while fulfilling his duties as curate in a large manufacturing town, and, being a widower, was about to leave a daughter hardly four years old to the mercy of the world. She hastened to the dying father, and felt strengthened for every hardship the act of adoption might entail upon her, by his one look of thankfulness. The marked indignation of her kindred, however, at this aggravation of the original offence occasioned her some trouble, and she

heard with gladness that the deserted Old Manor House of Beechwood might be had at a very easy rental. Thither, accordingly, she came shortly before the accidental meeting of the two children, and there she dwelt in a tranquillity thenceforth only interrupted by visits from her sister Philippa, who found in the conduct of Catherine's education a tempting theme for "friendly" strictures. The latter must be prepared to maintain herself by her own exertions, but by what means? The aid of masters was indispensable, and how were they to be obtained? This view of the question was somewhat depressing to poor Mrs. Mansfield's spirits, but Catherine's rose always with a rebound. It was her present easy duty to be thankfully happy, and she looked not beyond. No shadow fell on her gladness till she saw symptoms of failing health in one justly loved as a mother. Then bitterly did she bewail the having been perhaps, in part at least, the cause of the mischief by the privations necessary for her maintenance. Longing intensely to procure comforts for the invalid, she made the only effort in her power, an earnest appeal to Miss Trevor. The answer was, as she knew it would be,

full of bitter taunts; but she heeded them not, for Dr. Percival was called in. From the first, however, he gave little hope. The only chance lay in immediate change of air. There Miss Philippa hesitated, doubting which of the various winter stations was the most salubrious and the least expensive, till all capability of making the trial was at an end.

Contrasting in his own mind the very opposite dispositions and conduct of these two sisters, Dr. Percival proceeded to his other Beechwood patient, no less a personage than Miss Langley herself, the proprietor, as has been already stated, of the whole estate. A broad open road led upwards in the direction of the modern mansion, which was soon full in view. It was, in all respects, most unlike the habitation he had just left. In place of one faint twinkle, numerous lights, some stationary, some moving, gave tokens of an active household. But the physician's gaze was not drawn towards this dwelling by any strong absorbing interest. His attention was vacant for any object which might present itself. Something he could not clearly discern stood beside the road: was it

merely a stunted bush? On nearer approach it proved to be a little boy, very meanly clad, who, for immovability, might well have been supposed to be actually rooted to the soil. He was not crying, nor made any kind of supplication when the vehicle came up to him, but stood as one too utterly hopeless to ask for help. The kind-hearted Doctor, observing this, checked his charioteer.

"What's the matter, my little fellow?" he asked.

The child, holding out a letter, thus concisely explained his cause of despair:—

"Father bid me carry it yonder: they won't take it. He'll beat me; I knows he will!"

"No, he won't," was the cheering reply. "Give it to me: I'll take it in for you."

Perhaps there is nothing in human delight surpassing that of childhood when unexpectedly lifted over a difficulty insurmountable to any powers of its own. It was too dark to read features, but there was an unmistakable accent of grateful joy in the simple "Thank ye, sir," with which the packet was placed in Dr. Percival's hands. It was large and ill-folded—envelopes had not then descended to vulgar use.

"Some very poor petitioner," thought the recipient. "Well, this should be a propitious hour."

At a handsome portico, of the Anglo-Italian school, Dr. Percival was received with all due respect by those same domestics who had harshly repulsed the poor little messenger. Within the new Beechwood Manor fully corresponded to the promise of the exterior. The exclamation "Magnificent!" was the customary tribute to the architect's skill in the very moment of entrance. Nor had the solid comforts of existence been less carefully studied than the graces of decoration. The lofty hall, the noble staircase, the long galleries above were pervaded by a justly regulated temperature, warm, but not enervating to the system. Yet the mistress of this luxurious abode had lately found that sickness could force an entrance through all defences, and long maintain its ground. Nothing, however, was here wanting that could allay its severity, no imaginable comfort or indulgence. This patient reclined on piles of down, beneath silken hangings, and was even superabundantly attended, an experienced nurse and confidential waiting-woman being aided in their services by a

girl about the age of her who alone tended the dying at the Old Manor House. It was Maria Rashleigh who thus gladly repaid the indulgences on which she had so eagerly expatiated in her childish days. In this case, as in the other, the physician found his anticipations realized: the symptoms of recovery were more marked than at his last visit. Satisfied as to his patient's condition, he turned with quick professional scrutiny to one of her nurses.

"Miss Rashleigh, you are worn out: you must have rest, or you will be ill in your turn."

He did not speak without reason. Less practised eyes might have noted the effects of long confinement to a sick chamber on the beautiful girl whom he addressed. The large dark eyes had lost much of their lustre, the bloom had faded from the cheek, yet Maria Rashleigh attempted to laugh off the charge, and declared that, but for a little headache, she was quite well; Miss Langley likewise was disposed to treat the Doctor's mandate as unnecessary.

"Maria tired?" said she in surprise. "I assure you I don't think she can be. She had a nice long

sleep on the couch there last night—I quite envied her ; and I see no change in her looks."

But here there was a murmur of dissent.

"Oh, ma'am," exclaimed Marshall, the privileged attendant, "Miss Rashleigh has quite lost her colour!"

Dr. Percival also stood firm. There was, in this case, no call for a closeness of attendance prejudicial to health, no excuse for the invalid's exacting it. Maria's services might be more acceptable than those of any other, but certainly were not indispensable.

"Well, go and lie down, then, my dear," said Miss Langley at last. "I don't particularly want you just now, and I would not have you laid up. Sickness is very trying!" and as Maria, thus enjoined, withdrew, her faltering step betraying, in spite of herself, her great need of repose, the object of her solicitude sank back on her heap of pillows with a heavy sigh. Though she had attained the age of fifty-five, this was her first experience of sickness, and it had been sharp. Remarkable in health for high animal spirits, that support had failed her utterly under trial. She was but little sensible of her amendment.

"I'm not so much better as you think," said she, peevishly: "see how my hand shakes!"

"My dear madam," the Doctor replied, becoming a little impatient of this temper of mind, "your hand is steadier now than one which I lately saw write a will of considerable length."

She looked aghast. "A will! but you don't think me so bad as that, surely?"

He smiled at the sudden change. "Your condition is much better than his then was. Yet that effort did him no harm. On the contrary, he fell soon after into a sound sleep, and awoke quite another man. A will is no certain forerunner of death. I can vouch for that of my own experience: I made mine twenty years ago."

Miss Langley looked up to him, as he stood beside her, erect and vigorous. The example was certainly one to encourage.

"Well," said she, "but I'm not ready to make mine. I've not made up my mind. In fact, I never have thought about it at all!"

Dr. Percival's remarks had been spoken generally, with no covert design of a personal application. He, indeed, had not been previously aware

that she had so unwisely deferred the settlement of her worldly affairs.

"Hasty decisions," said he, "are certainly very undesirable. When intentions are already determined, it is not difficult to put them into regular form. But you, happily, may hope to have still time to consider the subject carefully. Much good may be done meanwhile. Here is some poor applicant at this very moment: may I place his petition in your hands?"

He had no reluctance in tendering "a begging letter" to this wealthy patient. She enjoyed a fair reputation for liberality, and received the packet accordingly without any tokens of displeasure; but in another instant her physiognomy underwent a strange transformation. An habitually good-humoured, jocund expression of countenance, some trace of which remained even under her present circumstances, gave place to one which it might have seemed the features were incapable of conveying. It was a complexity of passion which would have afforded an admirable study for an artist. Surprise raised the brow, anger flashed in the eye, yet scorn curled the lip. The physician

gazed in amazement, mingled even with apprehension, at the effects of his act. He saw that he had unwittingly pressed on some secret spring of extraordinary power.

"Which of the servants gave you this?" was the abrupt demand.

Dr. Percival, fully sensible as he now was that his interference had been less discreet than humane, could not regret having saved that poor child a beating. He hastened to clear the innocent.

"All blame in this matter rests with me. That letter was brought to your door by a poor little boy, from whom I took it in compassion, as he feared his father's anger. Your servants had refused to take it in."

"So much the better for them: they were perfectly right," answered the lady. She then examined the contents of the document. In substance they were pretty much what she had anticipated on recognizing from whom it came; but in mode of expression the writer had contrived to surpass all expectation. He was one of a numerous tribe of Langleys, struggling in the lowest depths of indigence, whose pretensions to affinity she had

always resolutely denied. He now wrote—under the belief that she was dying, which he very bluntly intimated—again to urge what he called his *rites*, while justice might yet be done to them. The letter was not so much one of entreaty as of insolent threat. She gasped with indignation as she read.

"You shall find yourself mistaken," she muttered in hoarse tones.

For a short time afterwards she lay in profound silence, undisturbed by any apparent notice on the part of Dr. Percival. Her mind was engaged in a manner wholly novel. She was contemplating her own demise, as an event which must, too surely, take place some time or other, and reflecting on what might then ensue. Should she die intestate, here was one who would infallibly come forward as heir-at-law. The possibility of such a succession was rendered doubly galling by the offensive language he now held towards her.

"I have been thinking of what you said just now, Doctor," she at length resumed: "there's a great deal of truth in it. It *is* better not to put off wills, and I'm determined to make mine without further delay. You'll be a witness, won't you?"

"If you wish it; but I understood you to say you had not considered the subject."

"Well, so I did; but, upon thinking it over, I find it won't give me much trouble. I can put it into very few words. Will you call in Mrs. Watson? I want to make quick work of it."

The prudent physician, while she spoke, had contrived to satisfy himself by the testimony of the pulse that the resolve, however rashly precipitate, was not the result of delirious excitement. She was evidently in no state which could justify him in resisting her wish. He regretted to have been the primary cause of what might prove to be a very injudicious step, but there was no help for it. He accordingly summoned the nurse, as another uninterested party, and they witnessed together an exceedingly brief disposition of the testatrix's immense wealth.

"There," said she, "it's done, and I'm glad of it—no more trouble about that. I think I shall be like your other patient, Doctor, and sleep the better for it."

Beechwood, among its other dignities, wanted not that of a popular legend: told at length in a

certain county history, laboriously compiled, it may be thus abridged :—

The Saxon thane, expelled at the Norman Conquest, was said to have vented his wrath in a widely comprehensive malediction: no race should hold it hereafter beyond the term of seventy years, till some individual should appear whose eminent virtues might redeem the original usurpation. However apocryphal this tale, it was certain that the domain had passed since that period from family to family, all of whom had seemed to be pursued by some remarkable fatality. Fine and forfeiture, slaughters on field and scaffold, had exterminated several houses in times of civil discord. In more peaceful days some had become extinct through failure of heirs; others had seen their numerous hopes swept away by sudden mortality. At length, early in the present century, the then owner, a spendthrift young baronet, found himself reduced to the extremity of sale. The purchaser, Richard Langley, was one who in several points resembled a celebrated namesake of the olden time. Like him, he had in boyhood wended his way to the great metropolis, and had there, by industry and

intelligence, aided by some lucky accidents—not perhaps the venture of a cat, but certainly the marrying a rich citizen's daughter—risen to the proudest mercantile pre-eminence while still in the vigour of life. But here the similarity ended; our Richard had no ambition to be commemorated in distant ages by the endowment of schools and almshouses. He had, however, a stimulating motive of his own, the acquisition of Beechwood Manor, in the immediate neighbourhood of which he was born. It was the dream of his youth, the fixed purpose of his after years; and eagerly did he grasp the coveted prize when within his reach. But he experienced, in his triumph, a grievous disappointment. The domain, ravaged as it had been to delay the ruin which nothing could finally avert, was not the Beechwood of his early remembrance. Favourite haunts were so changed as to be hardly recognizable. The fine timber had been cruelly devastated, especially that within view of the Manor House, and the goodly edifice itself was in a semi-ruinous state. Yet, deeply mortified as he was, he would not relinquish altogether what had been so long his cherished object. Since the

place could not be all it had been, it should be more distinctively his, the creation of his own taste and judgment. On another site, accordingly, a far larger and more splendid mansion arose. The full execution of his designs, the laying-out superb gardens, the collection of paintings, statues, &c., occupied him during the remainder of his life, a period of ten years. Just when he proposed to rest in the accomplishment of his labours, they were terminated by a short illness. An only daughter, then about thirty years of age, succeeded to his entire property.

The father and child were remarkably dissimilar. He, proud and reserved in temper, shunned all intercourse with the neighbouring gentry, lest he should not be received on equal terms: she, gay and self-complacent, was at once eager to welcome and be welcomed. His tastes were refined; he not only patronized art for the sake of distinction, but really loved it for its own: she delighted in nothing but show and glitter. During his life, in conformity with his habits, she dwelt in a seclusion which few suitors could penetrate; but when Beechwood became her own no one doubted that she would

soon give it a new master. Years rolled on, however, and proved her to be an Elizabeth of private life. More than one Anjou proffered vows to which she seemed to listen favourably, but the end was still rejection. When it came to the point of decision, she could not endure to resign her absolute freedom, the more thoroughly enjoyed as succeeding to a very strict paternal rule. This devotion to celibacy, and the having, as she declared, not a relation in the world, had the effect of raising her much in general esteem. Now that it became a question who might be the next proprietor of this fine estate, and enjoy hereafter the accumulations of Richard Langley's industry, the opinion became current that, notwithstanding certain palpable defects, betraying plebeian origin, his daughter was, upon the whole, a pleasant, friendly, good-humoured sort of woman, who ought to be met after her own manner. The principal families around her graciously opened their doors, and, more willingly still, allowed their daughters to enter hers. She thus secured the companionship of a bevy of damsels, entering as ardently as she could desire into that constant round of amusements

which she herself held to be the most desirable object of existence. It might be that her guests liked their entertainments not the less for the necessary admission of a select number of the opposite sex. Any motives of that kind, however, were carefully concealed from the hostess, as she was well known to resemble the Maiden Queen in not only declining matrimony on her own part, but in highly disapproving it in every one else; and to obtain the chief place in her regard was the predominant rivalry among those whom she gathered around her.

But, most unexpectedly, all hopes were overthrown, all scheming frustrated by an undesigning infant. Upon the first Sunday on which little Maria Rashleigh made one of the congregation in Ardwell Church, Miss Langley, looking down from her elevated pew, was forcibly struck by the charms of this fairest of the Rector's ten fine children. That sweet, smiling face, she said, was so bewitching that she really could not keep her eyes from it. An urgent request was made that the little beauty might be allowed to pass a day at Beechwood; and a very pleasant visit she found it—

caressed, amused, and feasted from morn to sunset one long summer's day. Not only was the mistress of the mansion lavish in indulgence; the guests vied with each other in tokens of regard. One young lady was dying to sketch her exquisite little figure; another could not sleep till she had dressed her a new doll. Sweetmeats and baubles poured upon her. Nor did this fervour of admiration subside till more ominous symptoms appeared, till the child's absence was peevishly bewailed, and it came to the frequent repetition of "Dear little creature! I really am growing quite a fool about her: I don't know how to live when she's away." Then, indeed, anxious attempts were made to supplant the intruder by setting up some rival pet; but in vain: Maria was preferred to a paroquet of the richest plumage, and to lapdogs of all varieties of breed, for the predilection first awakened by her beauty and playfulness was confirmed by an attraction in which she was above all competition whatever. Miss Langley had hitherto lived in an agreeable persuasion that she was universally liked. It seemed to her natural enough that her young visitants should be, as all professed they were,

quite charmed with her. But here was infantine sincerity, and she felt the difference. Incapable of discerning defects in one who treated her so kindly, Maria Rashleigh, from her earliest years, regarded the mistress of Beechwood with an affection which no one else could feel or assume to feel. Thus, as she passed from one stage of youthful attraction to another, she became only the more firmly established in favour. Yet the thought of deriving any great and lasting benefit from this partiality was a stranger to her mind. Never, indeed, did Miss Langley let fall a word which could induce such reveries. She had never spoken more truly than in declaring that will-making had never entered into her thoughts. The act, at length, was that of a moment, prompted by sudden and violent anger, the only motive of sufficient power; but, once resolved, she had not an instant's hesitation as to who should be the individual preferred. It could be no other than Maria, the sole object of her love and her pride.

Thus the same night placed these two friends in circumstances widely opposed. The one, on awaking from her refreshing slumber, learned with

astonishment that a will had actually been made bequeathing to her an immense estate; the other, as she wept over the departed, knew herself to be left a second time a destitute orphan!

CHAPTER II.

WHATEVER disappointed aspirants might insinuate, the parents of Maria Rashleigh were no fortune-hunters. They were, on the contrary, for more than one reason, averse to allow their child to pass so much of her time at Beechwood. But all their objections were overcome. In her eagerness to retain her young favourite, Miss Langley spared no expense. When they pleaded the interruption to education, she engaged masters whose terms far exceeded their own means; and that apprehension which weighed still more with them Maria herself dispelled: "If once I miss the running step at the return," said the Rector of Ardwell to his wife, "that visit shall be the last."

His daughter, in childhood and girlhood, stood the test to his perfect satisfaction. Home was as truly the centre of her affections as if the luxurious indulgences of Beechwood had been unknown ; and when she became "the heiress," as her brothers among themselves would playfully style her, it was only by her magnificent projects for the family benefit hereafter that any difference in her state of mind was discernible.

On a brilliant afternoon, about three months after the events just related, she was seated in the shelter of a broadly spreading cedar on the lawn of Ardwell Rectory, watching with lively interest the sports of her young brothers. Suddenly she looked round, and called, "Catherine!"

"She is not inclined to come," observed one of the boys. "She is pondering over her letter, I can see."

"Letter! I did not know that she had had one."

"Yes, I gave her one myself, and she took it up to—Why, Maria, you are not going to run away?"

But Maria was in the house before his words

were ended. Catherine sat at an open window, and had, indeed, been pondering so deeply that she had not heard her friend's summons.

"Arthur says you have had a letter, Catherine; and you have not told me?"

"Only because there was nothing in it worth telling. Here it is, if you wish to see it."

Maria hastily ran her eyes over the following words, penned in a stiff, formal hand:—

"My dear Miss Mansfield,

"My time has been so much engaged that I have had no opportunity till now of replying to your letter, received some weeks ago. You were not mistaken in supposing that, as a young person brought up at my poor sister's expense, I should be willing to assist you in obtaining a livelihood. But I am sorry to say that so many really superior young women are, to my knowledge, now seeking such engagements, that I apprehend you will find great difficulty in obtaining one. Under these circumstances, the best advice I can give you is to endeavour to improve yourself as far as you can, and then, at a future time, I will see what can be

done. With kind compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Rashleigh, to whom you are so much indebted,

"I remain

"Your sincere Friend,

"PHILIPPA TREVOR.

"P.S.—I have just heard that Mrs. Leonard Harrison, formerly Miss Darrell, has decided on taking a governess to assist in the education of her charming little girl. As Mrs. L. H., like all the Darrells, is most highly accomplished, of course I cannot think of recommending you to her. I only just mention the circumstance to show what *may* be obtained by those who have properly qualified themselves."

Maria had hardly patience to finish the perusal of this letter.

"Unfeeling, insolent woman!" she exclaimed: "how could you humble yourself to ask her assistance? But, Catherine, I really have great cause to be angry with you likewise. To form such a scheme as this unknown to me!"

"I hoped soon to disclose it in a more satisfactory manner."

"Hoped! In the name of truth and reason, do not say you hoped to become a governess!"

"Necessity often brings us to wish for what is not in itself agreeable. Circumstanced as I am, I may truly say I hope to become a governess."

"What! will you indeed forego all the enjoyments of existence in exchange for the bare means of maintaining it?"

"All enjoyments? Surely you exaggerate a little. Must I become blind, deaf, or dumb in that vocation?"

"No; then you would be disqualified and set free—a happier fate! In very truth," she continued, pacing up and down the room in increasing excitement, "if you enter on such a life, every faculty will be but an inlet to suffering. As you value your own happiness and mine, give up this desperate plan."

"It is no hasty, ill-considered step. I have remained here three months. I can no longer trespass on your father's kindness."

"Oh! if that be all, you need entertain no scruples whatever. His sentiments, I assure you, are quite patriarchal. I really believe he would account an addition to his tribe an augmentation of

his prosperity. Besides, after all, we really are not now so very great a charge. Frank, being promoted, is independent; and with Helen and Jane married, to say nothing of my own wonderful prospects——"

"There are but six children still to be provided for," interposed Catherine, with a smile. "As to this letter, though not very agreeably written——"

"Now, Catherine!"

"Well, then, positively disagreeable as it is, in substance it is true. I am not, I well know, '*properly qualified*' for my undertaking. It is easy for a heroine of romance to issue from a retired home an accomplished musician, artist, and all else; but to be a governess of high order professional instruction is needed, and *that* could not be afforded me."

The faltering voice told the current of her thoughts, which Maria, with ready sympathy, hastened to divert by asking, "Who are those Darrells of whom your kind friend speaks?"

"My models of unattainable perfection! Three sisters 'who might indeed be said to be educated!' as Miss Trevor used to say. Not that it was of

any importance to them: the mother's fortune was entirely settled upon the girls. However, I ought not to laugh at her, and the rather as I still depend upon her help. A governess I must be—if not in the highest walk, why then in a lower."

Maria was still resolute in opposition, but she changed her mode of remonstrance from the earnest to the playful.

"Well," said she, "I reverence your heroism in making the attempt; but, you see, Fate ordains that it shall fail. Come with me, and enjoy the freedom you retain. The boys want us, and the shade of the cedar is delightful."

Catherine was not disposed to lose the present in vain solicitude for the future; she was content to await results which she shrewdly surmised might yet follow her application. It happened accordingly. Miss Trevor, having duly magnified the value of her services, liked the dignity of patronage well enough, and soon intimated that, through the kind interposition of her excellent friend Miss Foster, she believed she might say that Mrs. Humphries Deane, of Hedgeham House, Bucks, would be willing to make trial of

Miss Mansfield's abilities as nursery governess for her four children, at a salary of fifteen pounds per annum.

There was much discussion in reference to this offer. Maria, after exclaiming vehemently against it, finally—as is not unfrequently the case with young ladies accustomed to carry all before them —enforced her exhortations by giving way to a little fit of sullenness, while her mother gently remonstrated, "My dear, indeed you are going to undertake too much: do at least wait for something better than this!"

But Catherine could not think herself justified in so doing. It might be that nothing else would come in her way for a length of time; she therefore at once wrote her acceptance of those not very tempting terms. Several weeks passed, however, and she heard nothing more. Every morning when the post came in, "No letter for you, Catherine," was repeated anew, and she was cordially congratulated on being "quite safe from Mrs. Humphries Deane." Harassed by uncertainty, she at length ventured to request Miss Trevor to make some inquiry into the affair. The

reply was not the most gracious. She did not know what harm she might do herself by betraying so impatient a temper; people liked to take their own time, &c.; but in the end she was informed that Miss Foster, "with her usual kindness," had promised to ask to what decision Mrs. Humphries Deane had come, and a note was soon transmitted to her, in which that lady had signified her pleasure in these terms:—

"Mrs. Humphries Deane is happy to inform Miss Foster that the sweet little rabbits are going on charmingly. The dear children are quite enchanted. Mrs. H. D. takes this opportunity to express her regret that Miss Foster should have had any trouble respecting the young person recommended to her as governess, as Mrs. H. D. is quite satisfied she would not at all meet her wishes."

This was not Catherine's only experience in what might be called "preparatory discipline:" several other engagements, when apparently near conclusion, were broken off abruptly without explanation. There is nothing in which the golden rule is more frequently set at naught than in

cases like these. Each one of us knows that where he or she is concerned it is desirable to have the question settled: we would have a reply, at all events. But reverse the position, and "Oh! they will understand," "No need of writing," are excuses too ready to palliate indolence—if, indeed, the subject be so much as taken into passing consideration.

But at length, through the exertions of the "indefatigable Miss Foster," which really deserved better than to be so much over-praised, a negotiation was opened which came to a successful result. A governess was wanted for the Lady Emma Vere, daughter of the late Lord Carisbrook, and brought up under the care of her grandfather, the Marquis of Donnington. "As Lady Donnington," wrote Miss Trevor, "is remarkably strict in her religious sentiments, the circumstance of your being the daughter of a clergyman has had some weight with her. I believe I may add that the countenance you have received from our family has still more influenced her in your favour."

Maria was grievously disappointed. She had

exulted when Mrs. Humphries Deane's "sweet little billet ended that affair so charmingly," as she said, and every subsequent failure had encouraged her in the hope that the departure of her friend was still at least a distant evil. Seeing every thing through the medium of vexation, she was provoked with Catherine herself for being too well satisfied with her ultimate success, and reproached her on the subject, not altogether playfully.

"I am half afraid," said she, "that you are not wholly free from the foible of liking the jingle of titles."

Catherine, surprised and rather hurt by the charge, prudently paused before replying, to consider what degree of truth there might be in it.

"I confess," she then said, with serenity, "that I do think they fall agreeably on the ear; they are meant to do so, I suppose; but my conscience acquits me of carrying the predilection further. I do not imagine this aristocratic family to be necessarily the better or the worse for their names. As an unnoticed spectator of life, however, which it is my part to be, I may per-

haps find some new occupation for thought in residing with them. It will be entirely fresh ground to survey."

"Ah, it is always the same," said Maria; "to find good in every thing is as natural to you as to inhale vital air; but on this point we differ greatly. My father was for some time tutor to Lord Brandon's sons, and what I have gathered from him would inspire me with peculiar dislike to entering any high family in a dependent capacity. And my own knowledge, so far as it extends, has strengthened this repugnance. What folly it is too! make what ideal distinctions they will, we are all one man's children after all."

In this remark Catherine traced Maria's keen resentment of some affronts which Miss Langley had lately received. To her own unprejudiced judgment they seemed to be attributable quite as much to that lady's individual defects as to her neighbour's disdain of her plebeian origin; but as it was a subject on which she could not think quite alike with her friend, it was one which she habitually forebore to discuss.

It was decided, then: Catherine was to begin

her career in life. In the near prospect of separation, she experienced redoubled kindness from all around her. Her choice was more particularly consulted in all arrangements in those her last days of independence, and each individual had some farewell offering to present with frank and affectionate eagerness. Maria was deeply mortified that her own share bore no proportion to her prospective wealth: she had little now at command. Miss Langley, proud of the buzz of admiration which greeted her beautiful young companion wherever she appeared, was lavish in the gift of ornaments, but did not seem to think that she could have any thing more to desire. The "heiress's" allowance was not on a very liberal scale, nor did she feel at liberty to transfer to friend or sister any article of decoration bestowed upon herself.

On the last evening of Catherine's stay they walked together to the Old Manor House, now utterly forsaken, and stood for some time on the road above, looking down upon it in thoughtful silence. Catherine's eyes fixed intently on the latticed casement of the upper room,

dazzled though they were by the sunset glow reflected thereon. Maria's gaze was directed elsewhere, her memory dwelling on their first accidental introduction to each other.

"There, just there," said she, "beneath that very willow did you sit, so busy with your rush baskets and primroses, that I thought you would never raise your eyes!"

"But when I did, it was with wonder, indeed! you seemed to me like a princess, mounted on your beautiful little steed."

"And I really felt myself not much less. Poor dear old Magnus, nothing that Miss Langley ever gave me pleased me half so well!"

Catherine was still fondly contemplating her former home.

"It has always seemed strange to me," said she, "that Mr. Langley did not rather rebuild the ancient house than erect one so entirely different. Superb as your future mansion is, it does not answer to its name: one expects a Manor House to bear the stamp of time, and to be thoroughly English in style of architecture."

"Very true; but I have been told he could

not reconcile himself to the place, altered as he found it. This very spot where we stand was once a noble grove, sheltering the house from the north wind. The havoc had been remorseless."

"If I could but hope they would spare it as it is!" said Catherine, earnestly.

"On that you may depend, at least," answered Maria. "Miss Langley, if left to her own choice, would certainly take no care to preserve it—she says the sight of it always makes her melancholy; but her father's early recollections induced him to spare that wing, and he left positive directions in his will that it should be kept in substantial repair."

"I am deeply grateful to him. Remember, then, when the larger mansion is yours, *this* is to be my harbour of refuge: I shall look forward always to ending my days within it."

"Not so, indeed! my views for your future years are wholly different. I will not imagine you immured for ever amidst slates and lesson-books! something much brighter may be in store for you."

"Without doubt. Let me sketch my future career:—my remarkable loveliness and brilliant accomplishments are to captivate the heir of a dukedom, nothing less in degree. Or, more probable still, in the chances of life, great discoveries are to be made as to my parentage; I am to return among you a countess in my own right, looking down with lofty disdain on this poor little estate of yours! Speaking seriously, however, I am not at all dismayed at the prospect before me, but it will cheer me greatly to hope that, come what may, you will keep that dear old dwelling secure for me. Will you promise me that?"

"Most assuredly! should peer or prince covet it, you shall have the preference. But you ought not to leave me now. I never, never will forgive you!"

CHAPTER III.

THE Marchioness of Donnington this autumn chanced to be numbered among those unfortunates compelled by some perverse destiny to linger in London when it is wholly forsaken by the great body of their compeers. But to her there was, in truth, little or no sense of hardship in the case: she regretted neither the pleasures of "the season" nor the departure of their votaries. Her occupations were all of a grave and independent character, such as the cessation of the hubbub that had lately reigned around her gave her only the better opportunity of pursuing. The cause of her detention was some rather perplexed family arrangement, consequent on the recent decease of her stepson, in which she had undertaken to act for her

husband, approving herself, as the agent was heard slyly to remark, "a much better man of business than my Lord." The latter, an habitual invalid, was now at Cheltenham, with his daughter, Lady Arabella Vere; and her only son, the present Lord Carisbrook, being at Eton, the Marchioness, in the seclusion of her mansion in Grosvenor Square, had no other companion than the little Emma.

The ordeal of a first entrance amidst a group of unoccupied male domestics had been endured. Across that wide hall, and up that stately staircase, Catherine had been conducted to her own apartment. The female servant who escorted her had withdrawn, after a half-offer of assistance which she evidently did not expect to be accepted. Glad to be alone, Catherine's point of attraction was naturally the window. The view it commanded was that most usual in the rear of great houses in London—a long perspective of leads, yards, and stables, terminated at some distance by another corresponding range. The prospect certainly was more novel than agreeable, and was not enlivened by the present state of the weather. The rising smoke, contending in vain against a thick drizzling

rain, imparted to the atmosphere that peculiar tinge of saffron so familiar to all residents in this great metropolis, but which to the eyes now contemplating the scene was no less strange than unpleasing. The only sounds which broke the stillness of the deserted neighbourhood were the dull, heavy descent of water through pipes and gutters, the incessant screams of a macaw, and the querulous rebukes with which an old woman in whose charge it was left endeavoured to overpower the unmusical note. Involuntarily, as she looked and listened, Catherine's memory recalled the garden and fields she had so lately quitted, their verdure, fragrance, and melody; and the contrast was dismal. She was surprised, often as she had dwelt upon what was before her, that it should prove so unimaginable. The bitterness of first experience, she found, mocked the power of fancy. A chilling sense of isolation crept upon her heart. There could not be, in that large dwelling, a single individual fitted to be her companion, far less friend. All other members of the household, whether masters or servants, had the comfort of equal association; but she must stand alone,

exposed, perhaps, to disdain and neglect on the part of both. And that same morning she had been a cherished inmate of Ardwell Rectory! What a deplorable change a short journey had effected in her condition!

This tendency to repine, however, was of no long continuance. The four simple words, "It is my lot," recurring soon to mind, brought with them, as by a holy charm, patience, strength, and hope. Calm and collected, she was ready immediately to attend a summons to Lady Donnington's presence.

The aspect of the Marchioness well became her rank. Her stature was majestic, her manner dignified, and the very thoughtful cast of her countenance accorded well with a dress of the deepest mourning. She was evidently not addicted to superfluous talking. Dismissing all preliminary topics as speedily as possible, she entered at once on serious discussion. There was a visible expression of surprise when Catherine stated that she had never had the benefit of her father's instructions, having lost him in her infancy; but it disappeared in a moment. Lady Donnington saw that there had been no intentional misrepresentation.

"Oh! I recollect," said she, in a somewhat careless tone: "you were brought up by one of the Trevors."

Catherine could not but be amused, recollecting the emphasis laid on "the countenance you have received from our family." On her own deep gratitude to her second mother she hardly touched: it was a subject too sacred for discussion with a stranger, even had the likelihood of meeting sympathy been stronger than it was here. After-knowledge confirmed the impression of her Ladyship's character received in this first interview. Lady Donnington was exemplary in her duties as a wife and mother, but the charity which could voluntarily assume the parental office, at the cost of so much self-denial, was far beyond her appreciation.

"You will find Lady Emma uncommonly backward," she proceeded, after a pause of rather awful duration. "She has been greatly too much indulged hitherto, but no time must now be lost. I should like to witness her first lesson."

And, in obedience to her command, a pretty little girl, about five years old, presently appeared.

The black frock, worn for a father—which so strongly relieved her delicately fair complexion—gave her an interest far beyond that of beauty in the eyes of one who had suffered a similar bereavement when about the same age. There was something, too, of timid sadness in the expression of her large blue eyes, which Catherine wondered the Marchioness did not dispel by the endearments adapted to her age. In her own tender sympathy she would actually have taken the interesting little orphan on her lap, had not Lady Donnington hastily and rather haughtily interfered.

"Pardon me, Miss Mansfield," said she; "that surely is not the right way of proceeding."

Confused by this rebuke, Catherine placed her pupil in all the decorum of education beside her, and, taking up a little book which lay ready on the table, applied her energies to laying that foundation on which the whole superstructure of human knowledge must be reared. Teaching the alphabet does not seem a very formidable undertaking, yet so she found it to be. She did not know why, but her instructions, plain

and simple as they were, sounded absurdly in her own ears. Her face became flushed, her fingers quivered with nervous agitation. Meantime Lady Donnington worked on with imperturbable diligence. In the fearfully long pauses preceding each new blunder, it seemed to Catherine that she could almost have counted each separate stitch which her Ladyship's needle achieved. At length the awful silence was broken by this remark, uttered in a particularly dry tone: "You have not been accustomed to tuition, probably, Miss Mansfield?"

"No," she answered, suppressing a sigh; "this is my first attempt."

"Ah!" was her Ladyship's significant reply.

Catherine now became sensible that her own and, very probably, the child's embarrassment proceeded from the consciousness of having an auditor, and one evidently not the most favourable in her judgment of either party. In proof of which, when her Ladyship chanced to be called away for ten minutes, greater progress was made than in the previous half-hour of her superintendence. That terrible stumblingblock

to the apprehension of infancy, the distinction between little *b* and little *d*, was at last happily removed; but unfortunately it did not occur to her to trace fact to cause: she continued to watch both teacher and pupil as closely as possible. The latter manifested increasing confidence in Catherine: once, indeed, she had come quite to the point of caressing, when Lady Donnington suddenly looked round. The effect was magical: nothing more was needed to reduce the child to a more timid silence and stillness than before.

But it could not last. They were necessarily much together, without other companionship, and, solitary each in her position, these two clung to each other with the closer sympathy. Comforted by having one near her to whom she could confide all her fond remembrances of her lost parent, Lady Emma's relations were full and frequent.

"Do you know," said she, gazing with a kind of mysterious awe on a humble funeral procession, "that Johnson says when my poor papa was buried there were a great many men on horseback, and such high black feathers! It was very grand indeed, she says. What does that mean?"

Catherine gently led her from dwelling on particulars—imparted by very injudicious garrulity—to those blessed truths which alone could soothe her infant sorrows. This the Marchioness had in some degree attempted, but without success. Her tone wanted tenderness; her language was beyond the apprehension of the little mourner. But the way to her heart was easily found by one who had known the same grief, and had been so lovingly taught where to repose it.

The Marchioness of Donnington was no Elfrida, not even of these latter days, when the passions which actuated that heroine seldom assume the stern forms of usurpation and murder. Never had she meditated the slightest injury to her deceased step-son, but, unconsciously though it were, she had harboured a sentiment of aversion towards him which had descended largely on his innocent child. Catherine had not been two days in the house before she became fully aware of this. It revealed itself palpably in all her Ladyship's directions, in all her remarks concerning the little Emma's capacity and disposition: a certain tone of asperity and harsh construction pervaded the whole.

It was also apparent that, even when fully agreeing in principle, they might differ greatly as to the best method of attaining the object in view.

"You will, of course, Miss Mansfield," said her Ladyship, on the Sunday succeeding the latter's arrival, "maintain a due observance of the day?"

Certainly; but what did that "due observance" imply? A system of rigid restraint, too likely, Catherine feared, to defeat its own object. Confined by heavy rains entirely to the house, Lady Emma wandered about in pitiable restlessness, endeavouring, most unlawfully and most ineffectually, to convert articles of furniture into substitutes for her incarcerated toys. Yet Catherine soon found her fully capable of receiving religious instruction suited to her age. She listened with deep interest to the explanation of Scriptural engravings; her countenance beautifully portraying that docility which He who loved and blessed infancy exhorted all His disciples perpetually to cherish in their own hearts; and at night she fondly whispered to Catherine that "*that* Sunday was like one with dear papa."

Unhappily, it was evident that none of her

surviving relatives either did, or could, in any way fill the void left in her infantine affections. Of her grandfather she spoke but seldom: he was evidently an object of great awe. The notice bestowed by the young uncle seemed to be only that of occasional teasing; and when it came to the Lady Arabella, the child confidentially owned that "she did not much like her." "She never kisses me, as you do; and when I broke her bracelet she was so very angry!"

Of one alone of her kindred—her mother's sister, the Duchess of Ilminster—she spoke with warm affection; but then she was gone away, very far—out of England, they said.

Meantime the Marchioness, having brought her legal affairs to a satisfactory conclusion, was in the act of departure for the family seat, when Lady Emma was attacked by scarlet-fever. The delay was exceedingly irritating to her temper, and was very unnecessarily prolonged, as she considered, by her husband's over-solicitude. Though not a fond grandfather, the Marquis was resolved fully to discharge his duties in that relation; and finding the child, on his return from Cheltenham, exceed-

ingly languid and wan, he listened with approval to his daughter's suggestion that sea air was essential to her recovery. The two noble ladies came to open conflict on the question; the one detesting all places of public resort, the other holding any preferable to the dull seclusion of Donnington. But two to one were an over-match even for the spirited resistance of the Marchioness. In vain did she represent that her own dear boy, after the same disorder, went nowhere but to the Castle. It was finally decreed that a short stay should be made at St. Leonard's.

The little invalid derived all the expected benefit—her bloom and spirits rapidly revived; and to Catherine also that sea-side residence was a most pleasing interlude in the drama of life. There was a healthful, cheerful freedom in days spent as much as possible under the influence of fresh breezes, and apart from Lady Donnington. The time soon drew to a close, however, and each hour seemed doubly precious in consequence. Catherine sat one morning in the open air, the more thoroughly to enjoy a long letter from Beechwood. Miss Langley had celebrated her

complete recovery by a series of gay entertainments; but the last, described in this letter, seemed to have possessed some peculiar attraction beyond what was exactly specified by the writer: some expressions, one or two of which had been partially erased, excited suspicions of a kind very interesting to true friendship. Catherine was musing over them, and becoming more and more persuaded that there was some underlying source of gladness, when she was disturbed by the sounds of sharp altercation close beside her. A sister in her own occupation, a young governess, undesirably distinguished by her beauty, was engaged in a struggle with three sturdy boys, each bent on dragging her in his own direction.

"No, Miss Lisle; I won't go up the hill to-day —I say I won't! I want to go down to the beach," clamoured the youngest.

"Hold your tongue, Charley!" vociferated the senior mutineer: "she *shall* come up the hill!"

"Now, Miss Lisle, you promised to go *my* way to-day; you know you did!" whined the second in age, clinging to her dress.

Catherine's compassion was so much aroused

by this scene that, advancing to the rebellious trio, she gently admonished them of their duty. It answered the purpose. A little overawed by the remonstrance of a stranger, though but another woman, they simultaneously relaxed their grasp on their so-called governess, who hastened from the spot, accompanied by Catherine. The three young gentlemen, tolerably content since no one had obtained the mastery over the other, marched on in front, while Lady Emma, alarmed by the late scuffle, held Catherine's hand very tightly, wholly disregarding the friendly overtures of "Little girl, why don't you come and walk with us?"

Miss Lisle was profuse of thanks for the opportune service just rendered to her. It had freed her from the annoying gaze of some impertinent loungers, and she saw that it really had required some effort on Catherine's part to put herself forward for that purpose.

"But, alas!" said she, "this is but a specimen of what I daily endure! The noise, the violence, the total insubordination of those dreadful boys! and yet their mamma believes them to be ex-

tremely orderly. She really wonders how I can complain so much of her little lambs! and so they grow every day more like tigers!"

The young lady's lamentations were interrupted by a spectacle which evidently interested her considerably. A numerous train of equipages encompassed a church they were passing: a bridal procession was just issuing forth. She lingered to observe, but on rejoining her companion was eager to vindicate herself from entertaining a vulgar degree of curiosity.

"The circumstances of the case are so peculiar, you know."

"No, indeed, I do not know: I have heard nothing of either party."

"Sir John Cressing and Miss M'Dougal," alertly answered Miss Lisle: "quite a romantic story—Cinderella in real life! He is very rich; she lived with her cousins, a mere humble drudge, and yet her pretty face has carried her above them all at last. What happy changes do occur in life!"

"If the gentleman's character be as good as his position——"

"Why, as to that, they do say that he is somewhat capricious and tyrannical."

"Then the difference of a vow may make her condition worse than that from which she escapes."

"Very true, no doubt. There they go! What splendid horses! Take care of that carriage, Charley—for Heaven's sake, take care!"

After this accidental introduction Miss Lisle was diligent in cultivating Catherine's acquaintance, which she declared to be her only solace in "her present miseries." When advised by the latter to seek a release from the compassion of her friends, she pathetically declared that it would be of no avail.

"An aunt of mine thought it impolitic to oppose a fancy Mrs. Chudleigh had for engaging me. It is very cruel! I was trained in Paris for something rather less intolerable; but all is neglected and wasted here!"

At their final parting her expressions of regret were ardent. "How deplorably I shall miss you! But we must not lose sight of each other altogether. Do give me your address, and take mine: we *must* keep up a correspondence!"

Catherine looked eagerly for the first appearance of Donnington, and found it surpassing her highest-wrought imagination in size and grandeur. It was a truly majestic structure, placed on a commanding elevation, beneath which, on every side, spread masses of ancestral woods. Such an object was fitted to conjure up at once the most striking images of the past, and the happiest illusions as to the present. Erected by some lawless baron to overawe the adjacent country, had it not been spared by time to indemnify posterity by spreading widely the benefits of kindly protection? With such reflections was Catherine's mind pleasingly engaged as she drew near the stately home of those whom she accompanied. Could she have read their own, she would have found them to be of a very different character.

The Marquis was wholly engrossed by a vexation of the moment, a loss of time. The journey from St. Leonard's, the railway system not being yet in full operation, had occupied more than an hour beyond his expectation; and though his plans for the evening included little more than the ceremony of dinner, a certain formal habit of

punctuality rendered him as irritable under the mistake as if it had deranged the most important affairs.

The meditations of the Marchioness, though on a subject of greater magnitude, were not more imbued with generous sentiment. Returning once again to the family seat, she rather too complacently felt her augmented dignity in being now not only the wife of the owner, but the mother of the heir.

Nor could the sister of the deceased young nobleman afford his memory more than a passing sigh, absorbed as she was by personal mortifications. Another autumn, and again she returned hither—still the Lady Arabella Vere! She had entered society, some eight or nine years before, with manners peculiarly cold and unengaging, persuaded that her advantages of person and station could not fail to secure her, without the trouble of effort, a suitable matrimonial establishment. Time had enlightened her on this point, inducing her gradually to adopt a more ingratiating demeanour towards those of the opposite sex; but the close of each successive season did but renew

the bitterness of disappointment, and send her again to the paternal home yet more unamiable than she had quitted it.

Such were the cares, and such the passions, which occupied this noble family on their return to their lofty dwelling. The calamity which had visited them was more feelingly remembered by their dependants. The late Lord Carisbrook had been much esteemed, and when his orphan child, borne slumbering into the hall, opened her eyes in half-bewildered recollection, there were few of the domestics grouped around who did not look upon her with true interest and concern. The housekeeper, Mrs. Markham, a woman of much shrewdness of observation as well as warmth of heart, forbore then to testify what she felt. But the next morning, while conducting Miss Mansfield through the gallery of family portraits, her look and gesture intimated, almost as plainly as if she had borrowed a somewhat trite citation from Shakespeare, the great inferiority of her master's remaining son to him who had been so prematurely cut off. And certainly, according to the ordinary rules of physiognomy, the judgment was not ill-founded. The

features of the living Lord Carisbrook offered nothing of which the most dexterous artist could present a favourable image. The other portrait —"*very like*," as the housekeeper remarked with a sigh—was that of a fine, noble-looking boy, the *beau-idéal* of what one in his position should be.

Catherine truly pitied the bereaved father, not yet knowing him well enough to be aware how incapable he was of justly estimating his own loss. While there yet survived an heir to his title the fabric of his greatness seemed to himself sufficiently well supported; he saw not how much of strength and ornament the fallen pillar had carried with it to the dust.

Marquis of Donnington! What room for other distinction? It was the spirit of the instruction his own mind had imbibed during a long minority from a doating mother and an obsequious tutor, and his Lordship rose to manhood and declined to age without surmising that the rest of mankind could possibly view the question in another light.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE years had passed away. Long since had Catherine learned the justice of her surmises respecting her friend Maria. Two or three subsequent letters afforded additional hints, and soon all was disclosed: she was affianced. But to whom?

"Really, Catherine"—it was thus she wrote—"I am ashamed to say! After all my flippant strictures on aristocracy, what will you say when I confess myself engaged to Colonel Falconbridge, of Holme Cliffe Hall, in the county of Somerset, connected with more noble families than I can as yet enumerate? To any one else this statement might carry some *little* appearance of pomposity: you will understand it as made in the depths of

humility! I shall indeed have no right to complain if you should severely satirize my inconsistency. I can hardly ask for mercy till you have had an opportunity of judging the case, as one of special exception."

Full well did Maria know, while penning these professed apprehensions, that she had nothing but the most cordial sympathy to expect in this quarter; but the engagement was far from meeting approbation in another, more near at hand. Maria had repelled the advances of so many admirers that Miss Langley had begun to cherish the somewhat unreasonable persuasion that she would continue, like herself, a perpetual votaress of celibacy. Her dissatisfaction for awhile clouded the happiness of her favourite, but it yielded to the latter's consequent loss of spirits. She confirmed the parents' more willing consent, and celebrated the nuptials with festivities of such uncommon splendour as not only to engross two-thirds of the local papers, but even to obtain a handsome notice in those of wider circulation.

In Catherine's mode of existence no change had occurred. Migrations from Donnington to

London, from London to Donnington, in measured round, filled up her years, yet there was no sense of tedium in this even course. Bright, joyous, loving childhood threw its charm over all, and created for her a real home-like feeling in those two mansions, otherwise so coldly, so uncongenially grand. There was, however, an alloy of dread: her deficiency in what may be called the graces of education might too soon disqualify her for that happy lot. But, fortunately for her, the Marchioness, not herself highly accomplished, attached the less value to that consideration. There was a talk of the aid of masters; and she was looking forward hopefully through a vista of perhaps ten years, when family events took an unexpected turn.

The Duchess of Ilminster, Lady Emma's maternal aunt, had, upon the death of Lord Carisbrook, earnestly petitioned to have the care of his orphan daughter. But Lord Donnington at once negatived the request: his son's child, he said, must live under no roof but his; and though he courteously qualified the refusal with the assurance that every attention would be paid to her Grace's

suggestions in regard to her niece's education, she was well aware that he therein answered for what it depended not upon him to confer. Diametrically opposed to the Marchioness, as she happened to be, in all points of opinion, the matrimonial connexion between them had engendered inveterate hostility. Lady Donnington disliked the Duchess as the fond sister of one who was at a future day to dispossess her of all the more solid advantages of her position; while her Grace, on her side, not thinking the gentle Lady Carisbrook at all capable of duly resenting the slights to which she was not unfrequently subjected, took the task upon herself, *con amore*, and blew the embers of discord almost into open flame.

The Duchess knew, therefore, that not the slightest influence in the management of the child, hardly even the privilege of free access to her, could she thenceforth expect. Her readiest consolation for the disappointment was the adoption of a scheme presenting only the excitement of an obstacle never found invincible, viz. her husband's inclinations. It was suddenly announced that the Duke and Duchess of Ilminster were going abroad

for a long period. It was something of a loss to the fashionable world. No parties rivalled theirs in splendour. It was more seriously regretted by country neighbours and tenantry; but it was a prolonged absence, nevertheless, extending through a period of three years. Whatever weary longings might be experienced by the Duke, in all tastes and habits a true-born Englishman, his fair consort's influence was predominant, and it was not till the attractions of all the capitals of Italy and Germany were exhausted that she began to think her own country might now be rather an agreeable novelty. They returned at the conclusion of the London season, and departed at once for Beaulieu, their fine country seat.

A fortunate chance put her Grace in the best possible temper for the resumption of her former part. Her *unfriend*, to borrow a useful Scotticism, was just then unwillingly obliged to exchange positions with her, Lord Donnington having been ordered to the German baths. She seized the opportunity, asking earnestly that she might have the charge of her niece in his absence; and the plan met his Lordship's appro-

bation; for, belonging to a generation of more stationary habits than the present, he had persuaded himself that his one little quiet grandchild would be a troublesome appendage in a foreign tour. The Marchioness was far from being equally well satisfied, but long experience had taught her that when her lord *was* positive, remonstrance only tended fruitlessly to provoke him.

The Duchess welcomed the child with passionate warmth, and was somewhat surprised to find nothing apparently objectionable in Miss Mansfield. The latter certainly had not the primness of manner and attire which was to be expected in a governess of Lady Donnington's selection; but, aware that first appearances are often deceptive, she soon took occasion to subject her little niece to a careful cross-examination.

"So you like your governess pretty well, my dear?" she carelessly began.

"Like her? Oh, yes, indeed I do: I love her very much!"

"And Lady Donnington, too, likes her, I

suppose?" said the Duchess, smiling languidly at the flush of feeling her inquiry had called into the child's face.

"I don't know," was the answer, given with more hesitation. "Lady Donnington seldom comes into the school-room now, and I am very glad of it!"

"Hush, dearest! Did you never hear the saying, 'Walls have ears'? Don't look so frightened, though; those around you are discreet, and will tell no tales. I was only giving a general caution, love."

The child was not a little bewildered, having spoken in perfect innocence of meaning.

"I only meant," she answered, "that I never can say my lessons well when she is there. Once, when I was repeating a hymn——"

"Hymns! you learn a great many, no doubt," interposed the Duchess. "And Miss Mansfield, I suppose, talks to you often very gravely—like a sermon, is it not?"

"Oh, no, indeed she never does!" replied the little girl, half smiling with surprise.

"Well, but does she not read a good deal to

you out of serious books? Think a little. Do you never hear any *tracts?*" Her Grace emphasized the last word strongly, but it awoke no association in Lady Emma's mind; she only repeated, "Tracts! what are they?"

"Oh, my dear, little books, very excellent little books, fit for the poor; they are bought for them in large packets at a time. Are you sure you never hear any of them?"

"Why, now I remember, Lady Donnington a little time ago did give Miss Mansfield some books with paper covers. Were they these tracts?"

"No doubt, my dear. Well, what did you hear of them?"

"Not much. There was one, I remember, which Miss Mansfield read to me: it was about a poor little girl who was very good, and worked hard for——"

"Very much to the purpose, certainly," said the Duchess, abruptly. Lady Emma, silenced, she knew not why, went on diligently with her needle.

"Do you like work?" her aunt at length resumed.

"Yes, I do. I want to work like Miss Mansfield. I do wish you had seen the mantle she made for the doll you sent me from Paris!"

"Why, you fastidious child!" exclaimed the Duchess, with sudden animation; "is it possible you were not satisfied with that costume? It could not have been more exact. Madame St. Ange herself was enchanted with it!"

The poor child, confounded by the sharpness of the rebuke, could only humbly ask, "Who was Madame St. Ange?"

"The most charming woman in Paris, who shows every one else how they should dress."

"Does she indeed, Aunt? Why, Barnes told me last night that all the ladies in Paris liked to dress like you!"

"You adroit little flatterer!" replied the Duchess, with a brilliant smile: "that stroke was really above your age! But I see how it is"—stroking her curls fondly—"Josephine's zeal has misled her; there was a little exaggeration in what you heard. No Englishwoman would pretend absolutely to lead at Paris. Some, perhaps, may be thought—and so you presumed to think that even Madame

Bertrand's work might be improved? Poor Madame! I wonder what she would say to your criticisms!"

Lady Emma, as much perplexed to know how she had so pleased her aunt as in what way she had provoked her, was anxious to vindicate herself from the charge of not having sufficiently admired the present she had received.

"Indeed," said she, earnestly, "I liked my doll very, very much! only I did think the mantle was not so pretty as one of Lady Donnington's."

"Lady Donnington's, my dear? Lady Donnington's dress a model for imitation! But it was Miss Mansfield, I suppose, who put that into your little head."

"No, indeed it was not! I liked it myself. I don't think I ever did like any thing else that Lady Donnington wore: it was only that one mantle. I wish you had seen it!"

The Duchess's lip curled as she said, "Be it so: I will take my little Emma's word for it. Lucky accidents happen to us all. But now, my dear, put aside that work. What is it, by-the-bye?"

"A frock for a poor little baby."

"Ah! very well, quite right and proper; but I wish to hear you play."

The unexpected command was obeyed with much trepidation: the little musician's fingers faltered over the keys; she hardly knew what notes she struck.

"Enough, enough! for Heaven's sake, stop!" cried the Duchess, with uplifted hands. "My sweet angelic sister, what would *you* have felt!"

"Dear Aunt, I am very sorry: indeed I will take more pains; and Lady Donnington has promised that, if I do, I shall soon have a master."

"Has she really?" replied the Duchess, her beautiful features so disfigured by an expression of bitter scorn that Lady Emma felt irresistibly prompted to look another way. Some ornaments lying on the table attracted her attention. The Duchess placed a pearl aigrette on her youthful brow.

"Now place it yourself, love," said she, resuming a tone of tenderness. "Not quite so—there! A very little change in position makes a great difference in effect: it is a thing to be carefully learnt."

"When may I wear jewels?" asked the child, as she gazed at herself thus unusually adorned.

"Let me see—how old are you, darling? Not quite eight. Well, then, patience for another ten years. But there is much to be done in the mean time."

"Oh, yes! I know I ought to grow a great deal better in that long time."

"True; but what do you mean, my dear, by growing better?"

"Why," answered Lady Emma, in some surprise, "I must try to correct all my faults."

"Quite right, my love, so far; but do you fully understand? I am so anxious about you. Manner—that is so all-important. Not that there is much to complain of, I am happy to say; but, my dearest child, to be truly pleasing, you must always have that object in mind. Do you know what I mean now?"

"I think I do: we ought to please every one, if we can."

"Ah! very well, my dear, I see you do, or at least you *will*, understand me. We shall be the best friends in the world, and you shall have many

more of my 'beautiful presents,' as you call them. It was *very kind* of Lady Donnington not to let you have the *confitures.* She always is so careful and considerate. Well, and what shall the next gift be? Another *poupée, costume d'été?* Would you like that?"

"Very much indeed, Aunt, thank you; and will Madame Bertrand dress that too?"

"Why, no; I think we must employ another *artiste* nearer home: Josephine's taste is almost as good."

And her Grace, disposing her attire to its nicest point of seemingly inartificial arrangement, contemplated the reflection of her own loveliness with a satisfaction rather too palpable for any other beholder than a child.

This little discourse was, on the whole, tolerably satisfactory to the anxious aunt. Imperfect indeed, most lamentably, was her niece's education, but the evil seemed to be rather of a negative kind—more the neglect of what was most essential than the indication of any thing actually blameworthy. If, therefore, as might be reasonably expected, Lord Donnington's maladies should prove rather

tedious in cure, there would be opportunity for effecting gradually considerable improvements.

No two noble residences could be more unlike than Donnington and Beaulieu. The Norman castle from its proud elevation commanded a vast extent of country, while from the latter mansion nothing could be discerned beyond the limits of a finely-wooded park. The very remembrance of the "working-day world" beyond seemed foreign to the luxuriously indolent habits of the place. The time of Catherine's arrival, however, with her young charge, happened to be one of extraordinary excitement; and indeed the frequent repetition of "our party," "their party," and the immediate demand for her assistance in making up bows of blue and silver ribbon, led to the conclusion that some great political contest was at hand. It proved to be one of a somewhat less important character. The widowed Lady Calverley, while Beaulieu was untenanted, had contrived to make her house the most attractive in the neighbourhood, principally by the help of archery, an accomplishment in which her three daughters excelled. But their Graces' return threw these

Dians sadly into the shade. The Duchess, finding the Misses Calverley presume rather too much on having introduced this popular amusement, resolved to foil them at their own weapons, and soon collected a band proud to be styled "the Archeresses of Beaulieu." The sisters, more seriously interested in maintaining their ground, formed likewise a company of faithful adherents. A challenge was given, and a beautiful glade, on the verge of the Duke's domain, named as the scene of combat. The terms agreed upon were these: nine nymphs in green and gold—the Calverley uniform—were to be opposed by an equal number of azure adversaries, so as to divide the affair by a succession of alternate shots, a majority in which was to place the trophies of victory, a handsome bow and quiver, in the hands either of the Duchess or Lady Calverley, as the rival leaders.

The eagerly expected day came: the weather most propitious, the arrangements admirable—as those of her Grace were acknowledged always to be—the assemblage gay and numerous, enlivened by an excellent military band. All went well till the period fixed for the commencement of

the engagement had for some time elapsed. Then, by degrees, symptoms of the weariness of protracted expectation began to appear. Watches were frequently consulted; inquiries as to the cause of delay became general.

It was one of serious moment—the absence of Miss Georgiana Heathfield, perhaps the most distinguished of the Beaulieu party. An express arrived at length: the Duchess read aloud, in tones of tender interest, the heroine's apology. So vexatious! in the energy of practice she had unfortunately injured a finger, had entertained hopes to the last moment of overcoming the effects of the disaster, but in vain; and though most anxious for the triumph of her friends, felt too much dispirited to be a witness of the conflict. The announcement struck both parties with consternation. It was obvious that, to reduce the ranks to the requisite uneven number, one couple and a half must sacrifice to party honour all chance of individual distinction; and it quickly proved that not a single competitor, on either side, was equal to such magnanimity. The proposed expedient of drawing lots was at once negatived

by the dissatisfaction of seventeen faces: what more disagreeable than such a risk with only a blank in view?

In this dilemma Lord Coningsby, her Grace's brother, had the wit to make a better suggestion. Might it not be possible, he asked, among so many fair spectators, to find one who could act as substitute for the lamented defaulter? Accordingly, with insinuating smiles, he mingled with the throng, tendering a bow, reserved in case of accidents, to every lady not intolerably plain and awkward. Many flutterings between vanity and bashfulness were experienced on the occasion. Some rural novices so blushed and stammered as to make their refusals hardly intelligible; others, well used to such affairs, detained the handsome Viscount with much superfluous discourse. But though his Lordship enlarged his limits of selection as the case grew desperate, he was every where unsuccessful, and was about reluctantly to proclaim his failure, when he perceived, in the highest of the semicircular rows, one young lady hitherto overlooked. It was strange, for an instant's glance assured him that none else

so well merited his homage. He employed his choicest rhetoric. Could those fair hands refuse their aid in so pressing an emergency? The young lady declined with graceful timidity: she really should be no acquisition to their party; she could not account herself at all a proficient. A hitherto silent chaperon then thought proper to interpose.

"This is absurd, Sophia! I leave it entirely to yourself how to act, but it is idle to deny your capability."

The hint was sufficient. His Lordship, hastening to the Duchess, received her own blue scarf, fringed with silver, as a token how earnestly she seconded his petition to the charming stranger. Further refusal was impossible. The Viscount triumphantly led forward his recruit. That moment afforded to one of the spectators a pleasurable surprise: Catherine Mansfield recognized in the face on which all eyes were eagerly bent one familiar to none but herself, that of the pretty Miss Lisle, first seen at St. Leonard's. The remarkable attractions of the latter produced a visible effect on her Grace, who murmured her approval to all around her. It was not merely

the charm of beauty, but the manner of the approach was so admirable! neither too rapid, as of one over-eager for an opportunity of display, nor yet absurdly reluctant. The eyes, too, so happily directed! not absolutely downcast, as some foolish girls might have supposed they should be, nor, on the contrary, boldly triumphant, a yet greater error; but evincing in their soft glances an exact sense of the degree of emotion befitting the occasion.

The combat began at length, inauspiciously for the Beaulieu side. The Hon. Selina Calverley left her competitor at a disgraceful distance; but then her sister Caroline sustained a signal defeat at the hands of Miss Charlotte Biddulph. The third daughter of the baronial house acquitted herself admirably, yet had the mortification to be surpassed, though by little more than a hair's breadth. The eight pair of combatants still left the balance equal; it rested with the ninth to decide the fortune of the day. The Calverley championess stood forward with the *nonchalance* of assured superiority, but, alas for human confidence! her despised, unknown antagonist took

far truer aim. With his own right honourable hand her titled cavalier placed the emblems of victory in that of the lovely Miss Lisle. The Duchess received them with her most bewitching smiles. Lady Calverley also was polite in congratulation, even adding something like an invitation to her house.

The three young ladies were most indignant at their mamma's undue condescension to the unknown interloper who had, as they contended, not without some show of reason, unfairly deprived them of the honours of the day. But their noble parent tranquilly vindicated herself from their reproaches. "It was the thing proper to say, and I am convinced she had tact enough to take it in that sense. My dears, you have had an agreeable *fête*, and worn a very becoming habit. Be content with things as they have chanced: nothing can be more injudicious than to magnify one's own defeat. The Duchess seems inclined to patronize this new adherent, therefore we had better not affront her. This little rivalry is all very well in its way, but, rely upon it, it will never do to be on seriously bad terms with Beaulieu."

CHAPTER V.

A DAY of unusual excitement is frequently followed, in childhood at least, by some disinclination for the ordinary routine of duty. Such was the case with the little Lady Emma: docile scholar as she commonly was, on the morning succeeding the archery *fête* she betrayed considerable restlessness, wishing often that her aunt would send for her, or that any thing would happen out of the usual course. And it did happen that her studies were a little interrupted, though not by any extraordinary indulgence. The apartments assigned to the child and her governess were quiet and secluded, as best adapted to the purposes of education: but few of the guests had occasion to traverse the corridor leading to

them, so that it awakened attention to hear any one approaching.

"Is that my aunt?" asked the child, with some eagerness. No, Catherine felt sure it was not: the step was too rapid. In another moment the question was settled by the entrance of Sophia Lisle. The visit was more of a surprise than a pleasure. The correspondence she had so eagerly solicited had soon been dropped on her own side, and Catherine could hardly doubt yesterday that she had been intentionally overlooked, for they had been very near each other several times. That suspicion was now converted into certainty; for how, but by her having been then recognized, could Sophia's present appearance be explained? When, therefore, she said, on entering the room, not without some signs of confusion, "You do not remember me, perhaps?" Catherine could not suppress the reply, "As well, at least, as you recollect me."

"Well, then," replied Miss Lisle, with a forced laugh, "I hope we have mutual pleasure in meeting."

"To-day," answered Catherine, significantly.

"Oh! as to yesterday, it was such a throng, I really hardly knew——"

Catherine interrupted the apology.

"It was a very agreeable *fête*," said she, dismissing Lady Emma into an adjoining apartment.

"Oh, it *was* delightful!" rapturously exclaimed Sophia: "would that all days in existence could be such!"

"I can hardly echo that wish, for its mere recollection has sadly hindered my little pupil this morning."

"Poor child, how very natural! But I do so from my heart pity you for having still to undergo that drudgery, being as I am, happily released from the yoke. 'On s'accoutume à tout, Mademoiselle,' my good friend Madame Marcel used to say when she saw me crouching over her miserable little stove in the anguish of my first Parisian winter. But she did not know me: two others did not cure me of pining for an English grate. And it is with my mind as with my frame. I never could have been inured to the evils from which I have escaped. I want the genial warmth

of society, such as this charming Duchess diffuses around her. Oh, Miss Mansfield, what a woman! The manner in which she has just received us —my aunt and myself—so indescribably winning! Really I could think myself in an earthly Elysium, but for one circumstance——"

The look and the tone accompanying the last words could hardly be misunderstood; they seemed to challenge inquiry; but as Catherine took no apparent notice, the young lady found it necessary to be more explicit.

"It is my aunt's anxiety rather than my own," she pursued, "which enjoins the little reserve I maintain here."

It was impossible not to ask the meaning of the last expression, so plainly was it pointed as for that object.

"Reserve on what subject?" Catherine inquired, looking calmly but steadily into her visitor's face. There was a heightening of colour under the gaze, but the answer was given with sufficient distinctness.

"Why, as to my late position——"

Catherine was not sorry that the re-entrance

of Lady Emma spared her the necessity of immediate reply to this avowal. While the child repeated the lesson she had been sent away to learn, Sophia, as in reverie, sketched on the fly-leaf of a grammar. The little girl, wanting the book, looked expressively towards her.

"I beg pardon," said Miss Lisle, presenting it to her hastily. "I really forgot what I was doing: it was inadvertent."

"It is of no consequence," answered Catherine, tranquilly, as the door closed again upon her pupil's leaving the room; "but I wish to understand the meaning of what you said just now. Did you come here to request my silence on the subject? If so, let me assure you at once that you are quite safe."

"I never had the least doubt of it," eagerly rejoined Sophia. "I told my aunt I was sure that, if it did happen to transpire, it would be unintentionally on your part. I knew I could depend on you."

"I certainly shall not publish the fact of your having been in the same occupation as myself when we first met."

"Pray do not misunderstand me. I would not for the world have you suppose me really ashamed of that circumstance. The idea of this little temporary concealment is suggested only by the necessity of conforming in some degree to the prejudices of this sad world."

"I cannot think we can ever be obliged to conform to what we disapprove," answered Catherine; "but we need not discuss that question. I wish only to put you entirely at rest as regards myself. It is evident that, feeling as you do, any intercourse between us would be uncomfortable; let us, therefore, henceforth meet as strangers."

Miss Lisle's eyes brightened at the suggestion, but she was ashamed of her gladness.

"Indeed," said she, "nothing but these very peculiar circumstances could induce me to listen to such a proposal; but, no doubt, our appearing to know each other might lead to inquiry; and my aunt is so anxious, and I am so entirely under her control——"

"It is quite settled," answered Catherine, with perfect composure: "it is needless to say any thing more."

Sophia coloured deeply, and felt each moment the more embarrassed. She had gained her point, and had only to withdraw, but knew not how to do so with tolerable ease. After a few instants of painful silence, during which she ransacked her brain for some pleasant topic, "How exceedingly Lady Emma is improved!" said she; "a charming child indeed! Her aunt revived hereafter, we may hope."

Catherine, not at all coinciding in this desire, answered only with a slight smile.

"Well," said Sophia, "I really must away: time runs on so fast, and they talk of a delightful drive." She rose as she spoke, and then, taking Catherine's passive hand in hers, said, in a humble tone, "You will not think *very* badly of me, I hope, for what has passed between us. Indeed I am no free agent: it is my aunt who guides me. I must obey her implicitly. Do just say that you understand this—that you do not blame me."

"I have no wish to judge your conduct in the matter," replied Catherine. It was all that she could say on the subject, but it was spoken with perfect openness of manner.

Sophia pressed her hand gratefully.

"One day," said she, "I do hope there will be no need of this—indeed, as it is, if it were not for my aunt——"

With this final apology she disappeared, really believing herself to be, as she said, no free agent. But, in truth, though the step she had just taken had cost her a painful effort, she had fully acquiesced in its necessity. She willingly followed the counsels of her relative, as tending to her advancement in the world. On her part the elder Miss Lisle regarded the younger chiefly as a means of maintaining herself in a position it had been her life's labour to acquire. She could not indulge in the flattering visions which were ever hovering round the latter, being neither young nor handsome; but a ready subserviency and perfect self-control had enabled her to gratify her ruling passion, that of associating with persons of rank and wealth, and it had lately occurred to her that Sophia's attractions might contribute essentially to assure her footing. In consequence she had withdrawn her from the uncongenial office in which she had herself been instrumental in placing her,

and taken her into her own immediate charge. The slight but opportune service rendered to the Duchess on the late occasion had been most favourable to her designs. An invitation given on the field of battle, in a very different manner from that of the rival leader, was eagerly accepted by the two ladies ; nor was her Grace less satisfied with the arrangement, finding the aunt a well-bred woman, fitting easily into the position she was expected to occupy, and the niece really quite an acquisition, gifted with talents which would add not a little to the attractions of Beaulieu.

Nevertheless, for some days after her arrival, Sophia's felicity was not untroubled. Secure as she felt as regarded Catherine, there was another who might, quite innocently, proclaim what she was so anxious to conceal. A tremor seized her whenever it happened that, in company with the Duchess, she met Miss Mansfield and her pupil. Nor were her apprehensions groundless. Lady Emma did notice with so much surprise that no sign of recognition was exchanged between her governess and one who had come so promptly to visit her in the school-room, that she at length

ventured to inquire the cause. Looking up earnestly in Catherine's face, after the fourth or fifth of these silent meetings and passings, she said, "You and Miss Lisle do not speak to each other now."

The only reply was, "No, my dear, we do not;" but it was quite enough; the child's quick feeling taught her that it was a little mystery into which she was not to attempt to penetrate, and thenceforth, whatever might be her secret perplexity, no symptom of its existence alarmed Sophia.

Catherine herself relinquished with little regret an acquaintance from which she had never derived much gratification. She had seen human nature in an unfavourable aspect, but for this she was not unprepared; and, for her consolation, it was soon exhibited to her in an opposite point of view.

It was the glorious sunset of a day in early August. What could be descried of the skies between the thick foliage of the grove she was about to enter offered every blended tint peculiar to the hour. Her dazzled eyes had little capacity for distinguishing any object beneath: she hardly knew that a gay procession swept towards

her on the road from which she had just turned aside — equipages of all kinds, horsemen and horsewomen; the Duchess herself, with a large detachment of her guests, returning from a distant excursion. But suddenly her attention was irresistibly attracted. A pony-carriage brought up the rear; one of the two ladies it conveyed sprang out, and hurried towards her. "Could it be?" she asked herself in amazed joy.

"My dear Catherine," exclaimed Mrs. Falconbridge, as she joined her in half-breathless haste, "how delightful! What can have brought you here?"

It was so like a dream that Catherine herself was at first incapable of speech. When utterance became possible, she said, "I am here with Lady Emma: she is the Duchess's niece, you know."

"No, indeed, I really did *not* know. If I had, how eagerly I should have come, having the hope of such a meeting! I cannot acquire peerage lore, useful though I should often now find it. But what a very fortunate chance it is!"

"You are not often here, are you?"

"This is the first time, and our visit was on an

accidental invitation. But we have been here two days without my dreaming even that you were beneath the same roof!"

"It would not have been wonderful had you gone away without knowing it. The roof is wide, and covers many who do not come much in contact. I seldom hear the names of the guests coming and going; and who would be likely to inform you of my being here? Who would guess you had any knowledge of Lady Emma's governess?"

She spoke with unaffected cheerfulness, adding, "Since we *have* met, let me see all I can of you. Will you walk with me to that dell, a favourite haunt of mine?"

"I can and will stay with you till dressing-time," said her friend, with eagerness.

"Then tell me all about them at Ardwell: your letters are always too short."

They walked slowly onwards, passing in review each member of the Rashleigh family, and dwelling at length on all their present circumstances and interests. Another theme succeeded, yet more interesting—little Langley Falconbridge, now two

years old. Fondly diffuse as was the mother, she said not a word too much for the attention of her auditor. But when they reached their proposed resting-place, the brink of a hollow, worn by time into a succession of natural terraces, Mrs. Falconbridge turned upon her friend's face a very inquiring gaze.

"You are looking for the traces of my miseries," said Catherine, with a smile, "and do not find them : no sunken eyes, or hollow cheeks, you see. No ; on the contrary, I expected content merely, but I have found real happiness."

"I could never have believed it on less than ocular testimony, and even now I marvel how it can be."

"See ! there is my source of felicity," said Catherine, pointing to a little fairy-like figure which came bounding up from one grassy level to another.

"That child ! my little enemy !"

"A strange name to give her, unpleasing to my ears."

"But I always have regarded her in that light, protest against it as you may : she took you away from me."

"Some other would, if she had not."

"And she has stolen your affections as well. Do you think that a way to conciliate me?"

The child joined them at that instant. She started on seeing Catherine was not alone, but, instantly recovering herself, presented the choicest of the wild flowers she had been gathering beneath to the stranger lady.

Mrs. Falconbridge was touched. She accepted the offering with a kiss as well as a smile, whispering to Catherine, "I understand it now."

This unexpected meeting, wholly free from absurd demonstration as it was, did not escape the shafts of ridicule. It happened that the young lady whom Mrs. Falconbridge had so abruptly quitted was one who piqued herself on a talent for sarcasm. On arriving at the house she recounted the adventure with some slight shades of addition, such as would give it the requisite degree of piquancy, and was rewarded by finding her auditors exceedingly amused.

"How romantic! Well, I declare I could not make so public a display for the dearest friend I have on earth; and all this was for a governess!"

Sophia Lisle, to whom this remark chanced to be addressed, stung at once by the reflection on her own former condition, and by the contrast between Mrs. Falconbridge and herself, could scarcely make an attempt at reply. Hastening to the privacy of her own room, she threw the hat from her heated brow, and breathed one heavy sigh. But the conflict of feeling she was suffering did but augment the glow of her beauty; she saw it in the mirror opposite to which she had hastily placed herself; and as she gazed the facile excuse suggested itself, "It is all very well for Mrs. Falconbridge to act thus; her position in society is assured: I, as yet, have none."

"As yet!" how much was implied in those two little words! Enough to hush all whispers of self-reproach, to banish from the countenance every trace of their having been heard, and irradiate it again with all the captivations on which so many towering hopes depended.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Duchess herself had listened with no severe disapprobation to the satirical narration of her young guest. The "For shame, you naughty girl!" was qualified by a half-smile curling her own ruby lip. Nevertheless, always observant of what became her as mistress of Beaulieu, her actions were those of considerate courtesy. Since Mrs. Falconbridge did condescend to recognize as friend one in so inferior a station, her predilection ought to be indulged. Her Grace, accordingly, politely urged Catherine to join the evening circle. Hitherto the latter had never so much as thought of availing herself of the general invitation given on her arrival: she much preferred retirement in her own apartment. But it was an extraordinary

temptation to be again in Maria's society. She was grateful for the attention shown her, and resolved to profit by it; not, however, without some hesitation. Her attire, certainly, was but ill suited to such an assembly.

"But that the Duchess cannot but know," thought she. "If it is no disqualification in her eyes, it ought to be none in mine."

She prepared accordingly, but lingered at the window for some time before she could summon the necessary resolution. As she gazed on the soft moonlight scene a little circumstance struck her forcibly. A herd of deer, startled in their covert by the approach of a keeper and his dog, rushed simultaneously across the green sward to seek another.

"They are very timid," was her reflection on this, "but they do not fear each other. Common kind is a bond of sympathy for a large part of the irrational creation at least, but not at all with our species."

It was no time for moralizing, however: the formidable descent must be, and was at last, achieved. She had entered a long, brilliantly

illuminated apartment, and taken a seat unnoticed, as she hoped, by the company with which it was filled. It happened that at that moment her own special attraction was also that of the majority of those present. Well did she know the voice sustaining the first part in a beautiful duet; often had she heard it with delight; but it was now much improved by superior culture. Self was forgotten in affectionate interest. It was not till the last cadence died away that she became aware that two young ladies sitting near, while affecting to admire a painting suspended above her, were making her the real object of their study. This was a trial. Conscious as she had been of the general inferiority of her apparel, she had not till then felt it as a poignant mortification. Every article she wore seemed, to her disturbed imagination, to have become poorer, or more out of date, than when she entered: no effort of reason could master the fancy. Soon, too, a still bolder stare convinced her that her position in the world was now under discussion; and truly content as she was in it, the implied contempt could not be wholly unfelt. But all things must come to an

end: her inspectors, at last having exhausted their entertainment here, turned to seek another, and she could breathe, and think, and look around.

"Which is Colonel Falconbridge?" was the first inquiry of her reviving faculties.

In a group of gentlemen near she soon distinguished, she felt persuaded, the object of her search. That one must be military: the air, the whole bearing, was that of habitual command. A lofty stature, fine cast of features; a man, in short, who, judged according to Flaxman's theory that the noblest souls are lodged in the noblest frames, might rank among the master-spirits of the age. The expression of countenance was less prepossessing. There was, she thought, a something of *hauteur;* yet it might be no more than what is honoured as "true dignity of mind." From these observations she was diverted very agreeably by being joined by Mrs. Falconbridge. There was no mistaking at any time the language of that face, and it was now that of lively joy. In answer to Catherine's praise of her singing, she said, most unaffectedly, "Oh, that was nothing!

You should have come sooner: we had a solo from the young lady now at the piano that was really exquisite. She is also, as you may perceive, uncommonly pretty. Her name, I understand, is Lisle."

Catherine commanded her countenance perfectly well as she received this information, with the addition, "She is here under charge of an aunt, and appears to be an especial favourite with the Duchess."

Another brilliant display of Sophia's musical powers interrupted the discourse; but it was hardly ended when Mrs. Falconbridge exclaimed, "You have not yet seen my husband, Catherine."

"I think I have made him out: is not that he?"

"I honour your discernment: it is indeed. But you have not yet spoken to each other."

"No, certainly; he does not know me, and I only conjectured who he was."

Mrs. Falconbridge sprang up eagerly, to Catherine's consternation.

"My dear Maria," she pleaded, "not now: he is talking."

But the only reply was the pretty, playful shake

of the head, so often seen in past years when her friend was determined on her own way. Without allowing time for further remonstrance, she stationed herself behind her husband. It was not her intention to betray her eagerness for the termination of the argument in which he was warmly engaged, but her countenance was so inconveniently expressive that it could not escape the notice of his antagonist, a grave and somewhat formal M.P., who, with a slight bow to the lady, walked away.

"Why did you interrupt us, Maria?" said the Colonel: "it was almost a rudeness."

"I am really sorry," said she, "particularly if I have robbed you of the honour of victory; but you must excuse me. I want so much to introduce you to a particular friend of mine."

The Colonel wondered whom this friend might be. Several families had joined the company since dinner. One of the Harringtons, perhaps? they were connected with the Madingleys—great people near Ardwell. Acquaintances such as these should be met with apparent cordiality, even at a moment of secret irritation. But what was his

dismay at finding himself—here, even at Beaulieu—introduced to a lady whose style of attire denoted her to be, in point of fortune, far below the grade of any one with whom he would have chosen his wife to be intimate! Reflections he had often before subdued with difficulty now crowded overpoweringly on his mind. His motives in marrying had been of a more mixed character than he was himself aware. Admiration of Maria Rashleigh's charms, blended with a due value for her prospective wealth, had inspired what passed with him, as with her, for true and genuine passion. Even before their union, however, he had been conscious that he, a Falconbridge, might well have aspired to a more splendid alliance: subsequently it had been his constant endeavour to detach her as much as possible from her own connexions. Nothing, therefore, could be more unwelcome to him than to find her at this ducal mansion, of all places in the world, eagerly proclaiming friendship for this very undistinguished-looking stranger. Totally unsuspicious of the tenour of his reflections, Maria at once introduced them to each other.

"This, Frederick, is the friend of whom you have often heard me speak—Miss Mansfield."

The Colonel bowed in silence. He was too much of a gentleman expressly to intimate that he had no recollection of any such name, and, rallying his powers as well as he could, he bore his part with a grace good enough to have veiled his dissatisfaction from any uninterested bystander. But to Catherine herself it was painfully apparent. The abstraction which momentarily interrupted what he said, an anxious turn of the head when any other guest came near, too clearly manifested to her the real state of the case. The discourse flagged on her side still more than on his, and soon was almost singly sustained by the vivacity of Maria, who, imparting to them the overflowings of her own gladness, saw not that they bore no real share in it. Happily for the victims of her fond mistake, the Duke, then just perceiving that Miss Mansfield made one of the party, hastened to speak to her. She had never before more warmly felt the charm of his true kindness of manner. Distinct as it was from the polished grace which adorned that of his consort, Catherine

was not singular in liking it much better. He freed her at once from the Colonel's presence. The latter hastened to put himself under the protection of a group on whose confabulations his spouse was not likely to intrude.

Catherine was happy again in the alternate enjoyment of music and talking. Sophia Lisle continued at the piano even when she had ceased either to sing or play, turning over the leaves of a book before her, and apparently pointing out some favourite pieces to a young man whose earnest gaze bespoke his depth of admiration. The eyes of Mrs. Falconbridge followed Catherine's in that direction.

"Ah!" said she, "those are ominous symptoms. I am sorry to see them. That is Charles Herbert, the son of a relation of the Colonel. It was at their house we lately met the Duke, who invited him here with us. I fear it may prove an unlucky visit to him. You wonder, perhaps, what I mean? It is hardly fair to say. Only thus far I may proceed: I do not like the aunt; there is something double, underhand there, I am convinced. Look at her: she is watching us; she actually

seems to know intuitively that we are talking of her."

There was no talking on Catherine's part: she avoided all reply to these remarks, lest they should lead her to betray what she had engaged to conceal; but she could not but observe with some degree of curiosity what was now passing before her.

Viscount Coningsby sauntered across the room, and with a very self-complacent air demanded, rather than requested, another of Miss Lisle's "charming songs." The young lady, with a marked coldness of manner, declined compliance. She had already sung too much: she must allow her voice rest during the remainder of the evening. The Viscount stood before her with a supercilious air, as if persuaded, nevertheless, of her final consent, and withdrew at length with the same lounging step with which he had approached, his manner that of studied indifference to the refusal. Sophia immediately renewed her discourse with Mr. Herbert with great animation. Mrs. Falconbridge had been no inattentive observer of this little scene.

"Catherine," said she, "I can no longer be silent.

Did you notice that dignified repulse? I chanced this morning to see similar attentions from the same quarter so differently received that I cannot but conclude her a finished coquette."

The remark rather startled Catherine. It brought to her recollection that she too, the preceding evening, had met Sophia and Lord Coningsby within a very short distance; that the former had betrayed more than usual embarrassment; and that the latter, who generally took some slight notice of his little niece, had on that occasion hurried on with no more than a nod, which said plainly enough, "Don't detain me." These circumstances, which had made no impression on her at the time, now seemed rather to corroborate her friend's conclusions.

"It looks to me," continued Mrs. Falconbridge, "like something deeper than a mere flirtation. I have seen symptoms of design on the aunt's part."

"Indeed!" said Catherine, in surprise; "and could they venture to lay the plot here?"

"A bold attempt, certainly, but perhaps not altogether desperate. His Lordship's danger consists, I think, in his suspecting none: he thinks

that he is now given up as hopeless. That *preux-chevalier* style of his, rare in these days, misled mammas and daughters formerly: they understand it better now. Do not think I am watching these manœuvres from idle curiosity: I am really interested for poor Charles's sake. I would fain give him warning, but it would be in vain: he would be unpersuadable, if not offended. Like the rest of mankind, I fear he will have to buy wisdom by experience."

CHAPTER VII.

THE Falconbridges left Beaulieu on the morrow, but Charles Herbert remained, and Catherine, without looking for it, could not but see confirmation of the suspicions which had been suggested to her regarding the schemes of the Lisles. Lord Coningsby and he were both evidently paying attentions to Sophia, and both receiving some kind of encouragement. She so frequently saw tokens of this state of affairs that she wondered they could escape the quick perception of the Duchess. The fact was, the latter's attention was absorbed in her own ill-success in a favourite object: she could make no progress whatever in remodelling the education of her niece. Catherine heard her suggestions always

respectfully, but could not be induced to follow them when they deviated either from the rules laid down by Lady Donnington, or from her own principles and convictions. And the child herself, obedient and loving as she was, could not be made to understand what it was her aunt desired her to become. She listened with affectionate readiness to the latter's inculcations, but always concluded that they meant, in other words, just what Miss Mansfield said. Two opposite rules of right she innocently believed there could not be; and therefore, as both her instructresses were so good and so wise, why, they must be really in accord, even if they seemed a little to differ.

One morning, after leaving the school-room, her Grace found herself too much out of temper to play her part as hostess to her own and her guests' satisfaction; wherefore, pleading a nervous headache, she remained at home till they had dispersed their several ways, and then took a solitary drive. A group of tired wayfarers resting on the edge of the foot-path gazed enviously on the ducal equipage as it rolled smoothly

past them, little imagining that the fair dame, its occupant, was hardly more conscious of its luxurious ease than they of enjoyments shared in common with her, the bright sunshine and balmy air. In the same mood of irritability and discontent in which she had quitted home would her Grace have returned, but for an opportune *rencontre* with a neighbour, Sir Richard Dallas. With her most fascinating cordiality she urged him to an immediate visit.

"Positively you must come: I shall tell the Duke he may expect you in two days at the farthest."

No invitation could be more courteous, yet Sir Richard at first declined, and was not without difficulty brought to confess the cause. He owned to being so foolishly fond a father that it was really a painful effort to him to forego his child's company even for a day.

But the Duchess only smiled the more bewitchingly.

"Oh! but I can sympathize entirely with you. My own dear little niece is now with me: I really dote on her. Bring Miss Dallas with you:

they will be admirable companions. Indeed, from the high accounts I hear of your daughter, I am persuaded nothing can be more desirable for my own darling than to be introduced to her."

The father's heart yielded to the praises of his child; and the Duchess exulted in the hope of having at least secured the means of quickening some degree of emulation in her niece's mind."

"She is, my dear," said she, in answer to Lady Emma's eager inquiries as to her promised companion's age, &c., "as I am told, about three years older than you are, and just what I could like to see you—a graceful—accomplished—charming little girl!"

A marked pause between each epithet of commendation was intended to give force to the exhortation; but the answer was lamentably childish: "I am very glad she is coming: I shall so like to have a playfellow."

To her Grace's portrait of the expected stranger it may be as well to append one at least equally true to the original. Sir Richard Dallas, an estimable and, in most respects, a sensible man, had fallen into one mistake, that of seeking consolation for

the loss of an amiable wife by doing all in his power to render his only child as unlike her mother as possible. The rule for the nursery first, and then the school-room, was that his little Elizabeth was to be contradicted in nothing; and the natural consequences followed: each year she became more imperious. Nevertheless, intolerable as the task of teaching was, she learnt well, for her capacity was quick, and her vanity excessive. That passion had been early fostered by her nurses as the only available check on her refractory humours. Not to cry, lest her eyes should be red; not to pout, lest her mouth should be spoiled; and other similar admonitions, had instilled into her mind as the one motive for self-government a desire to attract admiration; and, working upon this, her unhappy governesses and masters did succeed in bringing her unusually forward for her years.

The introduction took place accordingly, and was highly satisfactory to all parties. The Duchess saw in her young visitant the desired model of artificial graces; yet one, at the same time, so devoid of those which nature only confers as to

serve very well as a foil. Lady Emma's welcome had all the simple cordiality of her age and disposition, while Miss Dallas, secretly weighing her own importance as an heiress against that of a Marquis's granddaughter wanting that advantage, found the balance rather in her own favour.

The first private conversation between the two might have been amusing to an unseen auditor from its strong points of contrast. They spoke of brothers and sisters: Miss Dallas rejoiced that, having none, "she had every thing to herself." Lady Emma's astonishment at this way of viewing the question was irrepressible.

"I had a little brother who died when Mamma died. I do so wish he had lived!"

"All the better for you, very likely, that he did not. You might not have at all agreed: brothers are generally domineering."

With this reply Miss Dallas seated herself at the piano, contemptuously turning over the page which was open before her. Lady Emma stood beside her in wondering admiration.

"How beautifully you play!" said she.

"That is what *you* were practising, I suppose,"

said the accomplished musician, pointing to the piece she had so disdainfully rejected.

"Oh, no!" answered Lady Emma; "I could not play that: it was Miss Mansfield."

"Indeed! a pretty sort of governess she must be! I really believe I never had one who would not have laughed at it."

Lady Emma, colouring deeply for Catherine's sake, could only reply, "Have you had more than one governess?"

"More than one! Half a dozen, I think, in the last two years."

"How very disagreeable!"

"Why so? I liked the change."

"But if you were fond of them?"

"Fond! Who ever thought of fondness for a governess?"

"I love Miss Mansfield *very* much," said Lady Emma, low, but earnestly. Miss Dallas smiled at such childish simplicity, and turned the discourse on dress.

A very interesting epoch now approached—Lady Emma's eighth birthday, which was to be celebrated with extraordinary festivities: a

déjeuné in a marquee, a pony-race, a regatta on the lake, the feats of the most expert wizard of the time; every thing, in short, from morning till night, which could at once enchant childhood and win the approval of those of more matured taste. But all this was far from fulfilling her Grace's own idea of what such an occasion might become. She aspired to make it a kind of preparatory *début.* A successful display of juvenile attractions was a point of importance. Why should ten years of existence be lost in obscurity? Why should not the circles she was hereafter to adorn be prepared to expect her introduction with eagerness? A few scenes in some simple drama—French by preference—might spread afar the renown of her early vivacity and beauty. But, unhappily, the project was at once negatived by Catherine's declaring that her pupil did not excel in learning by heart, and that, even supposing that difficulty could be overcome, she would be entirely destitute of the courage necessary for performance. The Duchess's rejoinder poignantly indicated her displeasure at being thus baffled.

"She is certainly timid, and, in a moderate degree, I would not wish it otherwise. But, under judicious management, it would not impede her taking part in such an entertainment. As to memory, Miss Mansfield, like other faculties, it requires culture."

Her Grace swept out of the room with her loftiest dignity as she ended this significant rebuke, and Miss Dallas could with difficulty command her temper. She, indeed, did not credit Lady Emma's being really afflicted with so ridiculous a degree of *mauvaise-honte,* and had no doubt that Catherine's representation was maliciously exaggerated, purposely to deprive herself of a delightful opportunity of shining in public.

Other hopes arose. The day was to conclude with the most generally popular of all entertainments—dancing. Lady Emma had been left wholly uninstructed, as might have been expected under the Marchioness's misdirection, in this essential branch of education.

"Parsimony and Puritanism happily combined!" observed the Duchess.

But the neglect offered no impediment to the

child's enjoyment on this occasion. Sophia Lisle, herself perfected in Paris, gladly undertook to impart the rudiments, and Miss Dallas was an able assistant. In the progress of the undertaking a brilliant thought occurred to the Duchess. The preceding winter at Naples she had much admired a certain figure-dance, not at all difficult of execution. She knew the accompanying melody, and had sufficient recollection of the evolutions to enable Miss Dallas, who most ardently seconded her wishes, to render them complete. At all events the spectators, not having seen the original, could detect no inaccuracy in the copy. With such a *pas-de-deux* Lady Emma and her friend might open the ball with great effect.

So far all was well; but there was much trouble in making Lady Emma perform her part with the requisite steadiness. The Duchess, always present at the rehearsals, was liberal of exhortation.

"Now, my dearest child, do tame those wild spirits for a little, little while! There, that's rather better; but your head, you heedless sprite!

do observe how Miss Dallas carries hers. Thank you, my dear. I am sure this little wilful pupil owes you infinite obligation. You must have the patience of an angel to bear with her pranks."

Then, apart to Catherine and Sophia, "Really she is a charming girl. Her sweet disposition much enhances the value of her accomplishments."

The latter of the two auditors of this eulogium had a ready smile of assent; the former could only be silent.

"I never met with so cold a nature as Miss Mansfield's!" said her Grace, as she quitted the room: "she can admire nothing, praise no one."

Sophia was almost thrown off her guard by this remark. "Indeed I can assure your Grace" already trembled on her lips, when sudden recollection checked her speech, crimsoning her cheek at once with shame and apprehension.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE eventful morning came, awakening with its earliest rays two eminently happy persons—a child expecting the pleasures of a birthday *fête*, and a lover having just received encouragement to prefer his addresses. Charles Herbert was reported, among those who knew him well, to be a poet of no mean promise; but happening to be endowed quite as largely with good taste as talent, he was far from coveting that distinction at Beaulieu. Several palpable hints from her Grace that a copy of verses would be an extremely fitting offering were allowed to pass wholly unnoticed. Not a single couplet would he frame, till she accidentally revealed a part of the plan affecting the sentiment which was secretly taking

possession of his heart. Could an ode be procured, he found, his Sophia's own dulcet tones would breathe it on the public ear! The intimation instantly kindled the poetic flame: he felt himself equal to pouring forth lays on her Grace's kindred to the remotest degree, could they but be honoured with such recitation. True it was he had been accustomed stoutly to maintain that female accomplishments should be reserved almost exclusively for the gratification of the domestic circle; but his stay at Beaulieu, short as it was, had considerably qualified those opinions. The general influence of the company, and, above all, the fascinations of one among them, were fast reconciling him to the more ordinary practice of display. On the present occasion his remaining scruples quickly gave way. What was the theatre of Beaulieu? Nothing more, in point of fact, than the largest reception-room in the house. And where was the objection to recitation? It signified little, surely, whether that melodious voice were exercised in song or speech, except that to him the gratification of listening would be immeasurably augmented by the union in

which their talents would be blended. But his highest efforts were not lavished on the special object of homage. These were reserved for a preliminary address, in which he besought the fair Sophia to regard the whole but as an unworthy tribute to herself, and, if she deigned to regard him with favour, to intimate his happiness by receiving it as such. The packet was safely conveyed to her hands; and certainly, when they next met, nothing like displeasure could be descried in those lustrous eyes; their language, on the contrary, seemed to afford in full measure the tacit encouragement which had been humbly implored.

Never was there a day more exquisitely adapted for a summer's birthday *fête*—all sunshine, bright, unclouded from dawn till sunset; nor did a single *contretemps* disturb the course of entertainments. Catherine, happy as she was in witnessing the child's own intense enjoyment, yet found it agreeable to spend part of a complete holiday alone. Returning to a favourite summer-house to continue the perusal of a book which had much interested her, she was surprised to find it occupied

by Sophia Lisle, deep in the study of a sheet of writing, which on her entrance was, as by an impulse of apprehension, hastily folded up. Catherine, seeing this, was the more desirous speedily to withdraw.

"My book?" said she, looking around: "I thought I left it here."

"Yes, here it is," said Sophia; and Catherine would instantly have retreated, but for a detaining entreaty.

"Stay, Miss Mansfield; pray stay a moment. Pardon my addressing you thus in private when—but you have had the kindness to make allowances. I wish to explain your having just met Lord Coningsby, lest——"

"I did not meet him," interposed Catherine.

"Indeed! I thought you must: he was but that instant gone."

"He took the other walk, then, I suppose," answered Catherine, in a tone of indifference.

Sophia's countenance now betrayed regret for having disclosed more than was needful of her private affairs; but she proceeded, after a moment's reflection,—

"I must, for my own sake, explain why he came here."

"Indeed it is quite unnecessary," replied Catherine, not at all desirous of a confidential communication.

"But it may really be of essential benefit to me to have your judgment. I am placed in a most critical situation: the welfare of my whole life, perhaps, is at stake."

"Having a relation at hand, you cannot need a stranger's advice."

"A stranger!" repeated Sophia, with pathetic emphasis; "but it is but too just: I have forfeited all claim to your sympathy. Nevertheless I do indeed greatly need your counsel: my aunt, I fear, sometimes misguides me."

This was so very probable a conclusion, in Catherine's opinion, that she was induced to listen, at least, to what might follow.

"You perhaps know," said Sophia, speaking rapidly, "that I have engaged to repeat a birth-day ode in the theatre to-night. A gentleman I need not name has composed a charming address, which I should have delighted to recite. I have

given something like an implied promise, indeed; but Lord Coningsby, following me here, has overwhelmed me with solicitations to take in preference one written by himself. Now, this is my dilemma: both pieces are deserving of far greater honour than I can render them; but does it not strike you that Lord Coningsby's connexion with the Duchess and Lady Emma gives him a superior title to what he politely calls a favour? Ought not the other gentleman to take these circumstances into consideration?"

"Promises are binding," answered Catherine: "that is a rule universally acknowledged. How far your not keeping yours may affect Mr. Herbert —excuse me for speaking plainly—depends on circumstances known only to yourself and him. The only advice I, or any other friend, can give is to deal ingenuously." She withdrew with her last words.

As the day advanced the Duchess's mind became more intently fixed on the grand exhibition of the evening. When the child, in her gratitude, clung caressingly to her, "Yes, my dear," she replied; "I have indeed done

all I could to please you, and now the time is coming for you to repay me. That charming dance, darling, I have been looking forward to it all day!"

And so had poor Lady Emma! Too often had the anticipation of that formidable task checked the flow of her innocent gladness. Like many other misjudging persons, the Duchess sought to mingle the vanities of womanhood with the pure draught of childish pleasure; but in vain, as she herself could not but perceive. The hour she so eagerly expected was an object of increasing dread to her niece, whose nervous agitation, when the time of preparation actually came, was almost irrepressible. With officious zeal, but little effect, did Mademoiselle Josephine hold up to admiration each separate article of attire.

"Mais, voyez donc, Miladi, *ça* vous sied à ravir!" she exclaimed, as she fastened the snowy cambric vest with a brooch of gold. "Et ce jupon, que peut-on voir de plus joli?"

There was no answering sign of delight—quite the reverse. The scanty peasant-costume had not been yet familiarized to English children.

"It is nothing, my dear," said the Duchess, smilingly. "See, Miss Dallas does not at all mind it: hers is just the same. It is very pretty: every body will admire it, I assure you." Then, turning to Catherine, to whose malign influence she secretly attributed the whole mischief, "I think, Miss Mansfield," said she, in a lowered tone of voice, "that I must assign you a place where you will not be visible to Emma. The silly child seems to have some fanciful fears which, perhaps, the sight of you may rather tend to foster."

"As your Grace pleases; but Lady Emma has just entreated me to stand behind the scenes, to encourage her to the last moment."

"Indeed! now, really, that is a very foolish fancy of hers, poor child; but I suppose we must give way to it."

The theatre, communicating with the ball-room, was no sooner thrown open than it filled to overflowing. The assemblage included all ranks, from the most distinguished county families to the humblest members of the ducal household. The first object of attention was Sophia Lisle, who,

advancing in front of the stage, recited, as prologue to the forthcoming spectacle, the eventful birthday ode. It is to be regretted that no exact transcript exists; but, from such fragments as have been preserved, the character of the whole may be pretty fairly conjectured. The first stanza concluded with "votive lay" rhyming to "auspicious day." Lady Emma, shining in one verse as "the rising star of Vere," bloomed in the next as "Beaulieu's opening rose," &c., &c. But however far from novel might be the composition itself, rare indeed were the graceful action and musical intonation of the lovely reciter. The Duchess testified her delight by extending a wreath of laurel, as to a new Corinna. The whole company eagerly followed the example, showering down a profusion of bouquets. Proud was the moment for Sophia Lisle; but who shall describe what it was to the astounded Charles Herbert? At once the whole truth flashed on his conviction: he saw that the perfidious fair one had but played with his passion to make it subservient to her own designs. A half-suppressed smile on Lord Coningsby's lip brought to his recollection more than one suspicious cir-

cumstance which, in the fever of his delusion, he had disregarded and forgotten. Mortal patience could hardly have had a severer trial; for, in the midst of his amazement, his grief, and resentment, he had to endure the compliments of the mistaking Duchess on his "beautiful poetry," which, she graciously assured him, she considered quite worthy of such exquisite recitation. Contending emotions checked his utterance: he could not make his rejection of the undeserved applause in the least degree intelligible. The Duchess knew not whether to attribute his uncouth behaviour to a stupid excess of modesty, or to a vanity so voracious as to demand a yet larger supply of praise; but deeming the latter the more probable cause, she turned to her brother, who sat just behind her.

"Do, pray, Coningsby," said she, "help me to something superlatively agreeable! ordinary compliments do not seem to answer."

"Don't answer for what?" answered his Lordship, affecting a yawn.

"Pray don't pretend to misunderstand me,"

she answered, impatiently: "you must know I mean the ode."

"The verses—oh! they're very good, really very good. Can't you say that?" he added, after another prolonged indication of excessive weariness.

"For Heaven's sake be reasonable, Coningsby!" said the Duchess, in a tone of alarm: "you will give mortal offence by this folly. The author himself is just at your elbow."

"So near!" said his Lordship, looking towards the unfortunate Charles, but not at all lowering his tone.

"You are perfectly intolerable!" exclaimed his sister. "I am in no mood to enjoy trifling."

As she spoke the silken curtain was slowly raised, disclosing to view the two youthful *figurantes*, in very pretty Neapolitan costume. Miss Dallas, clasping fast the hand of her shrinking little associate, made a remarkably graceful prefatory obeisance. The one won much applause; the other deeper sympathy. But Lady Emma began her manœuvres with so lamentable a want of assurance as could be covered only by slurring two or three bars.

The Duchess drew back, and hid her face in her fan. It was a critical instant: the *pirouette*—it would fail, she feared. No, not so; the alarm was groundless. The pretty, pliant little foot was pointed to the admiration of all beholders, the rapid whirl achieved in exact time, the whole evolution executed to perfection. A buzz of approbation resounded on all sides; the Duchess revived again; but, alas! those very murmurs, designed to encourage, produced an effect directly the reverse. The poor bewildered Lady Emma mistook their import, fancied herself guilty of some heinous disorder, attempted to retrieve imaginary errors, fell into utter confusion, involved her partner also in embarrassment, and, rushing precipitately from the stage, flew to Catherine, crying, in broken accents, "Take me away! oh, take me away!" which Catherine effected as speedily as possible, seeing that there was, indeed, nothing else to be done.

In the theatre all were left in dismay. Miss Dallas remained on the stage in a very becoming attitude of surprise and concern, but, unfortunately, could attract no attention better worth

having than that of her fond father, who keenly regretted the interruption of a performance on her part, at least, so promisingly begun.

The Duchess was beyond measure indignant with Catherine, whom she believed to be exulting in the final success of her perverse opposition.

"My dear friend," said she, to the lady who stood foremost in the consoling group around her, "you do not know what I have to suffer in regard to that dear child! She is so cruelly mismanaged! her whole mind cramped and fettered by the narrow notions of the teacher to whom she has been, I may really say, so unjustifiably consigned."

Relieved by this ebullition of angry feeling, her Grace rallied her spirits in some degree, entertaining at first, indeed, some hope that Lady Emma, notwithstanding her unhappy failure in individual display, might yet be able to join in the common diversion. But having, with a view to this, despatched Mademoiselle Josephine with a message of condolence, she received from that intelligent emissary so vivid a picture of the disfigurement consequent on a long fit of weeping, as convinced

her that "it would really be a cruel injustice to the poor child to produce her again."

No more, therefore, was seen of the Lady Emma Vere; but the ball given in her honour was, it must be owned, not found to be very much the less agreeable. The juvenile guests especially, finding that her absence would not interfere with their personal share of enjoyments, danced merrily and supped heartily, while she herself, disappointed, ashamed, and exhausted, was conscious of hardly any wish but that of forgetting the whole affair.

CHAPTER IX.

YESTERDAY'S *fête* had begun in brilliant hope with its little queen, and with her poet: it had ended in severe mortification to both. But she had happy childhood's privilege for soon ceasing to think of it, and he, better still, the strength of manhood to remember it for his life's benefit. He quitted Beaulieu at once, but without betraying any symptom of despairing passion. The hour of his departure was not immoderately early, nor did he assign any fictitious pretext for the step. He simply thanked the Duke and Duchess for their courteous request that he would prolong his stay, and told them, what was very true, that it had already exceeded the limits his affairs would well allow. Nor did he leave to the

faithless Sophia the glory of a letter of reproach and lamentation: his adieux were spoken in public, and in the form common to the rest of the company. Contempt for her duplicity was already fast effacing the impression made by her charms. He could even now recognize that it was well for him to have been so speedily disenchanted.

Lord Coningsby's sensations, on the other hand, were by no means of a triumphant character: the excitement of rivalry had ended too soon, and when Charles Herbert, freed from the trammels of love, had fairly disappeared, his Lordship experienced a certain peevish discontent, which partook of the nature of envy. A wayward humour, which had characterized his behaviour the preceding evening, now showed itself more strongly: the noble Viscount neglected his usual assiduities towards Sophia, and actually shunned the approach of her manœuvring aunt.

But the latter was at no loss how to act in this predicament. Aware that her present position could be by no means flattering to her niece, she allowed her for a length of time to remain undisturbed in her own apartment. And in fact, when

she did enter, it was obvious that great prudence would be requisite in approaching the subject. Sophia's attitude and expression indicated the tenour of her thoughts. Her hands were clasped tightly together, as if to keep down some rising feeling in her heart, and the half-averted face glowed with the inward irritation. Looking around for some means of opening the discourse to good effect, her wary kinswoman caught sight of a book of her own—Lodge's "Peerage"—and took it up with a significant smile.

"A pleasant companion this," she said.

"I have not been looking at it," was the cold reply: "I did not even know it was there."

"Indeed! Well, my dear as matters stand, it was not unnatural to suppose you might have been studying it."

"I do not understand what you mean," answered Sophia, still more frigidly. "I hardly ever open the book; and I do not know why I should be expected to care more about it to-day than usual."

"Nay now, Sophia, you carry simplicity too far—after yesterday's triumph!"

The ill-suppressed passion at once flashed forth.

"What triumph? Do you expect me to exult in having disregarded even common honesty; and that, too, for one who testifies no sense whatever of the honour I did him? Yes!" with kindling eye and quivering lip, "it *was* an honour, however lightly he may esteem it: I could feel the difference between the true poetry I ought to have recited and the worthless rhymes he strung together; of that he may be well assured!"

The words were spoken with indignant scorn, as though the object of wrath had been present to receive his chastisement. The aunt was really alarmed at their vehemence.

"Sophia," said she, "you actually amaze me! What more than you now have can you require in proof of Lord Coningsby's sentiments?"

"Sentiments indeed!" repeated the young lady, with an impatient action of the head. "My dear Aunt, how can you be so very blind? You surely ought better to understand this frivolous worldling. Vanity, selfish vanity, was his only motive. Observe his demeanour to-day; and tell me, who but the weakest of her sex could be any further deluded?"

"Really," rejoined Miss Lisle, "this manner of talking is very extraordinary. Any one not possessed of a key to its meaning would be utterly confounded. For my part, I am afraid I can interpret it too well. This gentleman who is gone—you had, I presume, the folly to be so captivated by his boyish admiration as to weigh it against rank, wealth, and all other conceivable advantages. A brilliant match on one side; on the other a rival with a rather better knack at versifying!"

"It is absurd to talk of rivalship in such a case," replied Sophia: "Mr. Herbert might have loved—Lord Coningsby knows not how. Oh, if you knew how I weary of his vapid compliments!"

A short pause ensued. The aunt perceived clearly that while the departed Charles was so fresh in remembrance it would be vain to attempt to confound the distinction between his genuine passion and the empty adulation of the Viscount. In reply, therefore, she merely endeavoured to depreciate the value of the lost prize.

"I can allow for a good deal of exaggeration," she resumed; "it is natural to your age; but, in

sober truth, this young man is but an adventurer in life."

"You do him great injustice," interrupted Sophia, with ardour. "His connexions are high: you must be aware of it. Indeed, at first you yourself seemed extremely well disposed towards him."

This retort provoked a sarcastic smile, giving point to the reply,—

"Your memory is wonderfully retentive, it would seem, on this particular question. As to myself, having but a secondary interest in it, I cannot pretend to recall every word I may have said. However, if your ambition soars no higher, it is all the better. High rank and large estates will not come in your way at every step; but the humble mediocrity you seem to prefer is not so very difficult of attainment."

This stroke told. Sophia was not without some share of girlhood's romance, but ambition had already become the governing principle of her actions.

"It is useless to dwell on the past," said she, with a sigh: "it is irretrievable."

"Wisely said at last, my dear. Now, then, hear

me—do but hear me. I have surely some little right to advise. I have not, I think, shown myself negligent of your welfare."

A pause followed this exordium. Sophia was too much dissatisfied to give any voluntary token of assent, though it was evident that she had some curiosity to know what kind of counsel she was about to receive; but it was of a nature that Miss Lisle herself rather shrank from disclosing.

"I have thought deeply," said she, "and I see clearly there is but one course to pursue. But, I must forewarn you, my proposal is not one to please. It involves some sacrifice to both of us."

Sophia's countenance still more clearly demonstrated that her attention was aroused, but she would not condescend to question. Miss Lisle found it necessary, therefore, to explain herself, which she did with deliberation, fixing her eyes steadfastly on her niece all the time.

"We must 'stoop to conquer' not unfrequently, if we would secure great objects. It requires no great experience in life to learn this. You have had great advantages, but you cannot retain them. Our visit here has been unusually long; it must

soon terminate, and then all is undone, unless you still keep in sight. Now it is plain to me that there is but one method of effecting this object, and that is your attaching yourself to this family as governess to Lady Emma."

"How!" ejaculated Sophia, incapable of another syllable.

"I told you the plan would be repugnant to you," pursued her aunt, "and so it is to myself as well."

"Oh, what vain talking! You—you cannot imagine what you are suggesting! To lose every thing at once; to be sent again to the rear of society—it is too, too much! I cannot, I will not! How *can* you ask me?" cried Sophia, passionately.

Miss Lisle was prepared for the outbreak, and sustained it in resolute silence.

"And for what," resumed the unhappy remonstrant, "have I practised these mean deceptions, if this is to be the result? Why have I been made to despise myself for hiding what, after all, I am now called on to avow?"

"Not to avow what *has* been: far from it,"

answered the politic monitress. "Command your temper, and you will perceive there is no inconsistency on my part. I brought you here with no settled plan. I only knew that in such society you must not be known to have lived as governess. I have now a definite object; I should rather say, *you* have; and I am pointing out the only chance of securing it."

Sophia was still strenuous in resistance.

"The scheme," said she, "is as wild as it is odious. I wonder how you can think of it for an instant. How do you propose to turn me into Lady Emma's governess? There is poor Miss Mansfield in the way. Incomprehensible as it is to me, I really believe she has no dearer object in life than the care of that one little foolish child. Am I to rob her of it?"

"It is mere idle nonsense. I wonder, on my side, that you can be so easily imposed upon. Miss Mansfield finds herself, much above her merits, placed in a high family, and, naturally enough, wishes to remain there. That is the secret of her wonderful tenderness for this particular child. But you may set your conscience

at rest, as far as she is concerned; for, depend upon it, her dismission is near. Last night's silly scene has made that sure, if I know any thing of the Duchess."

Sophia continued impenetrable. Her pouted lips and contracted brow, and many half-inarticulate complaints, repelled the advice she had received, before she again spoke distinctly.

"You have arranged it all with wonderful smoothness; but, pray, how is my benefit to be founded upon this expected dismission?—my *benefit*, as you actually would have me regard it! Just tell me how you can expect Lady Donnington to select me for Miss Mansfield's successor? I am not, I believe, exactly the sort of person she is likely to approve!"

Miss Lisle could be patient, though her pupil was perverse, and somewhat disrespectful moreover. She answered, with becoming composure, "You may safely leave the whole affair to me. Lady Donnington will soon be here. I see my way more clearly than you suppose. Be but reasonable; that is all I ask."

The first conversation ended here; but it needed

many another before much progress could be made in the design projected. Sophia recoiled with actual horror from the thought of resuming her former mode of life.

"Ah, dear Aunt, I conjure you, think what it is you ask me to do! To forego all these enjoyments, these delights, and descend again to that miserable servitude!"

With these and other such plaints was the counsellor continually harassed, but very seldom was she urged to make reply. Once only she attempted a pithy rejoinder: "Governess for six months, Sophia; Viscountess for life."

This was but a small part of her task: other formidable difficulties were to be surmounted. Were even Sophia's own objections overcome, two persons of widely different opinions must be brought for once to concur, before she could be placed in the desired position. The first to be gained was the Duchess; but Miss Lisle, no novice in the profession of petty intrigue, readily devised what to do in this case. She commenced operations by informing her Grace confidentially, as one who had manifested so kind an interest

in her niece, that unfortunate family circumstances would compel the latter, very soon, to devote her talents to the office of tuition.

The Duchess manifested the liveliest sympathy. The act, in one like Sophia, seemed invested with the sublimity of martyrdom.

"Such a charming girl! really quite a loss to society! It is positively heroic!"

Such were the first expressions of surprise and concern elicited by the communication; and not two days elapsed before the wily guest was admitted, in her turn, into the counsels of her noble hostess.

"If, indeed," her Grace remarked, "her amiable young friend had seriously determined on so great a sacrifice, it would certainly gratify her exceedingly to secure the benefit of such instruction for her dear neglected little Emma. To such hands," said she, "I could safely trust the dearest charge I have in the world!"

Miss Lisle was as much enraptured as if such an idea had never flitted before her in wildest dreams.

"Equally desirable for your niece and mine,"

said the Duchess, with charming condescension; "yes, certainly; if it can be brought about. But we must not be too sanguine. Lady Donnington's views are so directly opposed to my own that I have reason to fear, should she even be persuaded to dismiss this same exceedingly objectionable Miss Mansfield, the next selection might not be more consonant with my wishes. Yet, with the aid of patience and prudence, I do not despair of effecting our object."

"Our object!" How could Miss Lisle be sufficiently grateful? Obsequious attention to every little hint respecting her part in the drama was her best method of evincing the sentiment.

Upon the arrival of the Marchioness, therefore, the two ladies, each in her place and station, acted in concert. The Duchess paid unprecedented attention to the inclinations of her noble guest, assembling to meet her none but staid and sober-minded persons, not much accustomed to find themselves bidden to Beaulieu. She even endeavoured to imbue her own discourse and occupations with a corresponding tinge of gravity. But the Marchioness knew her too well to be so

easily deluded. Though she talked much of fixing on a site for an infant-school, and requested to be favoured with an abstract of the system which she knew had succeeded so admirably at Donnington, her Ladyship scarcely condescended to reply, and was, indeed, rather disposed to apprehend some secret design in the extraordinary deference shown her.

But the inferior party in the plot had the advantage of not being liable to suspicion. Miss Lisle did not attempt to propitiate by palpable flattery: her advances were skilfully covered. Whenever the Marchioness spoke she listened as to an oracle, seldom offering any remark of her own, but intimating, silently, her humble and profound acquiescence. This course of conduct answered completely: before the end of the second day she was established in her Ladyship's esteem as a woman of very good sense, whom it was really strange to meet with in such a house as this.

Neither was Sophia viewed with disapprobation, though she could not equally please; the explanation of which was, that the latter had,

within the last few days, undergone a real transformation, insomuch that no one, seeing her for the first time, could imagine what she had so lately appeared. Heart-sick at the impending change in her condition, she talked very little, would seldom either play or sing, and was almost as much changed in aspect as in manner. The Duchess excused her for not contributing as before to the *agrémens* of Beaulieu, in pity to her unhappy position, and the rather because she knew it would favour the project for fixing her at Donnington. Nor was the alteration without its effect on the Viscount. Beauty in distress touches even the hardest natures, and real sadness is easily distinguished from that which is merely assumed as a grace.

So far the position of affairs was highly satisfactory. But one important point was yet to be gained: Catherine must be dislodged to make room for her intended successor. The Duchess confessed herself totally at a loss here; but her skilful accomplice soon discovered that the Marchioness, conscious, perhaps, that she did not herself love her husband's grandchild, entertained peculiar

jealousy of her affection for others. Profiting by this observation, Miss Lisle noticed, as if quite casually, the *remarkable* influence which Catherine appeared to possess over her pupil. Lady Donnington's countenance instantly betrayed that the right chord had been struck: it needed but a few more dexterous insinuations to complete the work. She was soon persuaded that Catherine, while entrusted with the sole management of the child, had considerably departed from the system pursued under her own direction. Her manner, in consequence, became so haughtily reserved that Catherine anticipated a probable dismission by voluntary resignation. The step took Lady Donnington by surprise, and, in truth, caused her some degree of vexation; but, too proud to enter into any kind of explanation, she only grew every hour more ungracious in demeanour. It was a state of affairs which Catherine resolved, at whatever personal sacrifice, to terminate as quickly as possible. Lady Emma's habitual awe of the Marchioness might be deepened into actual dread, should she see her in a state of positive hostility towards the object of her own warm affection.

Her Ladyship was therefore informed that, if not inconvenient, Miss Mansfield was desirous of relinquishing her engagement without the delay to which she was otherwise entitled. This was a most lucky move in the game which was being secretly played. The Duchess had only to appear utterly unaware of what was passing, which she did with inimitable art. Her partner had a more active share, and was not less perfect in success. In reference to the general question of governesses, she pathetically lamented the peculiar difficulties attending her dear niece in consequence of her personal attractions, insinuating delicately how much her own anxieties would be lightened could she but place her under the protecting supervision of such a woman as the Marchioness. It succeeded: her Ladyship's compassion was touched, and her vanity flattered. Sophia Lisle, certainly, would not have been the object of her especial choice; but she was young, her character might be moulded, and it would really be an act of mercy to preserve her from the hazard of entering some family akin to the Duchess of Ilminster's in laxity of thinking. And as regarded Lady Emma,

here, at least, there could be no danger of any attempt at undue independence. The offer was made accordingly, and, it need hardly be said, accepted with the liveliest demonstrations of grateful surprise.

Catherine, on learning this arrangement, felt with natural indignation that she was a victim to matrimonial speculations, utterly unsuspicious of their existence as both the noble ladies most certainly were. She wrote to announce the step she had been obliged to take in consequence, both to Mrs. Falconbridge and Miss Trevor. The latter's reply may be conjectured from these few hints: "much surprised—after so much trouble had been taken—could not, indeed, have looked forward to any long continuance of such an engagement—but abrupt proceedings gave room for unfavourable conclusions—no hope, of course, of any thing at all similar—something very different—teaching in a school, perhaps," &c., &c.

The other answer ran thus:—

"Dearest Catherine,

"I am sorry and glad to tell you that

you cannot revisit Ardwell at this time, my parents being absent at Eastbourne. So there is absolutely no resting-place for your wandering feet but Holme Cliffe, whither you must immediately come. How I long to exhibit my house, my garden, my model dairy, and—my boy! Frederick being absent, I must include his welcome in my own. Come at once, any day that suits you: I am quite ready.

"Ever affectionately yours,

"MARIA FALCONBRIDGE."

On reading this cordial invitation Catherine had only to wish that she could but feel as well assured of the Colonel's full concurrence in it as his wife evidently did; in default of which, she took care in reply to intimate that she hoped not to be long disengaged.

Nothing now remained but to communicate the tidings to Lady Emma. That task, however, was so acutely painful that she deferred it till she was anticipated by another. Mademoiselle Josephine, proud of a secret carelessly disclosed by her noble mistress, hastened to impart it to

the child, but was astonished at the manner in which it was received. Vainly did the officious informant add that Catherine's successor was "cette charmante Mademoiselle Sophie!" The little girl rushed from her to implore a contradiction of this strange and sad report. But, alas! Catherine could but confirm it, and, even when the first impetuous passion of grief was hushed by her tenderness, found herself very inefficiently provided with means of consolation. To say that the new instructress would love her pupil half so well as she herself did was altogether impossible: she could dwell only on her superior attainments.

"Miss Lisle will teach you French, my dear."

"Why, so do you," replied the child, almost resentfully, as if an attempt had been made to impose on her simplicity.

"But I cannot teach it half so well as she does: she has lived in Paris. And then, you know, she is a fine musician: you will like to learn to play like Miss Dallas."

"No, I don't care about it. Oh, why will you go away? I thought you would not leave me!"

The exclamation was accompanied by another

flood of tears, depriving Catherine of all power further to restrain her own. But this first indulgence of mutual sorrow was also the last. Conscious that jealous eyes were upon them, Catherine afterwards not only kept her own feelings under command, but exerted her gentle influence in moderating those of the child. To avoid the agitation of a parting, she arranged her departure for a very early hour. The last "good night" rang like a knell in her ears; she felt, indeed, as if the concealment were cruel, though really prompted by tender solicitude.

When all was hushed in the mansion she stole softly to the bed-side of her darling charge. The kindly influence of sleep had effaced all traces of sadness: the little slumberer looked herself again, happy as innocent. But Catherine's tears flowed the faster as she thought of the contrast of the morning's waking, of the grief with which none would sympathize, which might even be harshly reproved.

She laid upon the pillow a letter of fond farewell; but it wanted that which would have rendered it most soothing—the expression of a

hope that they might meet again. No such gleam of comfort could she impart: the Marchioness's last words and looks had been those of the loftiest displeasure. She knelt down to take the final gaze, to give the last kiss, to breathe an earnest prayer that the trust she so sorrowfully resigned might be faithfully discharged by some other.

CHAPTER X.

THE domain known by the name of Holme Cliffe was admirably adapted for the residence of an English country gentleman of good fortune. A handsome house, sufficiently spacious, stood in the midst of lawns and parterres, beyond which stretched a rich pastoral landscape, bounded in the distance by a range of wooded hills.

Catherine, though most affectionately welcomed by the mistress of this attractive abode, looked with secret apprehension for the appearance of the master. Maria was quick to discern the troubled expression, but far from suspecting the cause.

"I see," said she, "that you are grieving over parting from that child. I feared you were

becoming too fond of her: you had made her too much your own."

"Perhaps I had, since I could not keep her as such. But I will not dwell on that thought here."

"Think and talk just as you feel inclined. We have the whole day entirely to ourselves: the Colonel will not be here till night."

Catherine's spirits revived considerably upon this intimation; but, as some counterpoise, she heard of another arrival expected on the morrow. Miss Langley proposed halting here on her way from the Devonshire coast.

"To own the truth," said Mrs. Falconbridge, "I am not entirely easy as to this visit. She is, you know, the very personification of good humour; but there are sometimes little particularities with which one comes in contact one knows not how. I look round and round her rooms, and recall to mind her arrangements at Beechwood as fully as I can, and yet cannot but fancy there will be a deficiency somewhere. But my chief apprehension regards Frederick: he is as yet but slightly acquainted with her. We have been so little together since my marriage; and one can

hardly expect from a man unfailing indulgence for the foibles of an elderly lady. I grow extremely nervous in thinking it over sometimes, and, I verily think, should lose heart altogether if it were not for your having come to my aid. You will understand it all, and prevent mischief, perhaps. At all events, if things will, after all, obstinately go wrong, I can pour out my vexation at once to you."

Many affectionate hints gave Catherine plainly to understand that her intimation before coming was wholly disregarded, and that she was expected to make a lengthened stay. The morning hours passed happily away in strolling over the grounds. Many projected improvements were pointed out, but it was apparent that the Colonel's inclinations led him to larger expenditure than his wife judged advisable.

"See, here are *my* plans," said she, when they returned to the house. "What need have we for more stabling than this for which I have allowed? And observe, if it must be so much enlarged, it encroaches on my own province, the poultry-yard. My poor turkey-cock will scarcely have space

enough for strutting. Is not that an ungrateful return for my architectural designs? But look, look! here comes my chief of treasures!"

And taking the child from the nurse's arms, she held him up, rosy from the midday sleep.

"Now tell me," said she, in her delight, "is not the sight of him at this moment worth your forty miles' journey this morning?"

The vaunt had as little as might be of maternal exaggeration. Langley Falconbridge was really a beautiful child. Some resemblance might be traced to his handsome father; but the open expression of the large hazel eyes, the dimples round the coral mouth—these were so plainly derived from his other parent, that Catherine not only admired, but loved him at once with all her heart.

The nurse was dismissed, and he remained under their charge a considerable time, trotting backwards and forwards, his little hands filled with trifles which they pretended to wish to be conveyed to each other.

"Your position in life is a most happy one," said Catherine. "If you stood but a step or two

higher in the scale, you would hardly have leisure for so much of his company."

"I know it well," answered the mother, earnestly. "Most gladly would I remain just where we are, if Frederick thought like me. But it is not in man's nature: he must be always reaching onwards. You may see the instinct in its germ even in *him!*" she added, as the child stretched out his hand for a thimble, withheld as an article of some danger.

It was spoken playfully, yet there was a shade of pensive expression in her face. But, quickly making an effort to subdue the feeling, she caught up the boy with a fond embrace, and danced round the room, singing gaily the well-known aphorism of a Scotch ballad,—

> "The present moment is our own;
> The next we never saw."

Catherine had known no happiness like this day's since she quitted Ardwell three years before, with the sole exception of a few hours lately at Beaulieu. Her youthful charge, dear as she was, could not wholly supply the want of communion with a mind matured, and bound

to hers by the strong ties of early association. It was not till a late hour that the discourse was interrupted by the signals of the Colonel's approach. The brilliant gladness of Maria's look, as she started up, almost reconciled Catherine to a very opposite effect on her own nerves. But her host performed his part better than she had ventured to hope. It was easier to him, apparently, to be tolerably courteous in his own house than when under the observation of the guests at Beaulieu. Appearances were less favourable next morning: the Colonel was extremely moody, but it was sufficiently evident that Catherine's presence was not the cause of his taciturnity. A few half-muttered ejaculations explained what it was: the expected coming of Miss Langley was the incubus on his spirit. His wife looked anxiously at him from time to time, and, when his movements showed him about to leave the table, said, with the abruptness of one who must make an unwelcome communication at all hazards,—

"Oh, Frederick! if you are going, I must tell you that you have but a short morning. We dine at an unheard-of hour—five o'clock."

"Five!" he repeated, as if doubtful if he heard aright.

"Yes, indeed; and I fear it will be necessary all the time Miss Langley is with us: she thinks it essential to her health."

"Pshaw!" said the Colonel, kicking aside a footstool.

"But, you know," said his spouse, gently detaining him, "we must comply with her wishes as far as we can. You will be here at the time, will you not?"

Her importunity having wrung forth the monosyllable of assent, she released his arm; but, looking sadly at Catherine as he left the room, "What will become of me," she said, "between their opposite tastes and wills? You see how much he is discomposed even before she is here."

"It may be better when she is come. Anticipation is sometimes the harder trial."

"Thank you for that hope," replied Maria, brightening. "Well, I will go and give her rooms another look."

Precisely at the hour she had named—three o'clock—the illustrious visitant appeared, in great

travelling pomp. A formidable quantity of luggage filled the hall, and two female and three men-servants impeded the proceedings of the Colonel's own well-ordered household, their mistress herself superintending, and giving two or three different directions at once. In vain did Maria, mortified by this vulgar bustling, reiterate her assurances that all should be done to her satisfaction.

"Nothing like seeing to these matters oneself," said she, when all was at length adjusted. "Whom have we here—Miss Mansfield? Very happy to see you. Ah! you are one of the starvelings still, I see; but it's not always those that are best in condition that are best in health. Heigh-ho! I'm sadly short-breathed this morning. Coming up those tedious hills is shocking hard work: one really feels as if one drew the carriage oneself. Heaven help the poor animals that do! Well, my dear, and so here you are! and a very pretty sort of place you have—and very well furnished, too" (casting a scrutinizing glance around): "yes, a nice room altogether. And you're tolerably contented, are you? haven't begun

to repent just yet? You know I warned you that must come."

"It has not come yet," replied the favourite, laughingly.

"Ah! it's very fine talking now; but wait till the man grows old and cross, and wants nursing, perhaps; and then you'll see that we of the single state, with no one to please but ourselves, have the best of the bargain—won't she, Miss Mansfield? In the meantime, however, where is he? where's the Colonel? But I need not ask—with his gun and his dogs, I suppose. Droll, to be sure, that they should think it sport to scramble over ditches on a drizzling day like this! Not but that we ladies at home are much obliged to them, for well-dressed game is dainty fare. There's great art in it, however; it's just one of the simple things they all think they can't mistake, and yet it's surprising how often I have to complain of it. Pray, my dear, what sort of a hand is your cook? Young women, if they do marry, should give a little attention to such matters; for, let me tell you, no man likes an ill-dressed dinner. Nine times

out of ten it puts him quite out of temper. And in a house like this one should expect to find a real cook."

"I hope I have not neglected my duty in that point," answered Mrs. Falconbridge, with a smile; "but it has not been very strongly impressed upon me: the Colonel is easily satisfied."

"Is he? Ah, true! I remember I noticed it when you were with me. Well, for my own part, I see no harm in keeping a good table. People live by eating."

"And die by it also, as we see too often. But it is time to think of one at least as important among us as the cook: nurse, I know, is all ready for a summons."

"Ah, the boy!" exclaimed Miss Langley. "Dear little fellow! let him come at once: I long to see him."

Langley was produced accordingly, and highly admired.

"Well, he really is a fine, noble boy!" repeated his godmother, more than once; "and I've brought something that will set him off. See! what do you say to this?" placing on the child's head

a hat of rich material, but very faulty in point of taste. "Doesn't he look well in it?" pressing down the cumbrous covering in spite of all infantine resistance. "Foolish little fellow! he doesn't understand the becoming—but did you ever see him look so well?"

The mother answered evasively: "He always looks well, at least in my eyes;" kissing her darling, at once to conceal her own embarrassment and compose his impatience.

"That's the way he should be painted," resumed Miss Langley. "It so took my fancy that I couldn't help buying it. I love to see children prettily dressed. Put him up at the window, nurse. Let Papa see him in all his beauty."

Mrs. Falconbridge, though averse to this suggestion, could not oppose it. But the Colonel's protracted absence completely tired out the patience both of child and nurse: they were released from their station long before he appeared. The furrows of discontent had wrinkled his brow all day, but he smoothed them as well as he might, and welcomed his guest with a fair amount of courtesy; while she, in return, assured him that

she liked the place exceedingly: she had never seen one that pleased her better, for its size. Mrs. Falconbridge feared that this qualification of the compliment would be somewhat offensive to her husband's fastidious taste, but as he took no apparent notice of it, she began to hope that, in his hours of solitude, he had better disciplined his mind. She too soon found herself mistaken. Little Langley, now become rather proud of his new decoration, pressed forward to say in his imperfect language, "Hat, papa! pretty hat!"

"Pretty hat, my boy!" exclaimed the Colonel, taking him up with a gaze of astonishment.

Some exceedingly strong expressions were obviously on his lips, but his wife contrived, unseen, to touch his arm, and he had just enough of self-command to forbear further speech. Setting down the child, he hastily withdrew, followed to his dressing-room by the anxious Maria. Scarcely had he closed the door when he vehemently exclaimed, "In the name of reason, how came you to allow that child to be made a Merry Andrew, a scarecrow?"

"Nay, my dear Frederick; you exaggerate. The hat is not in good taste, and he looks much better in his own straw; but it is not so very monstrous: I have seen other children wear such things."

"What is that to me? If other people like to make fools of their children, must I follow their example?"

"We do not like it, but unluckily she does, and how can we decently complain of her choice?"

"Such a gift is in the nature of an affront, too," said the Colonel, knitting his brows to a still darker frown. "Does she think we cannot dress our own child, but must be indebted to her for bedizening him?"

"Dear Frederick, do not be so captious: do but regard the act as it was meant—one of kindness."

"Then it should have been very different from this. But say what you will, I maintain that the giving any thing of the kind *is* an offence: it implies that we do not or cannot dress the boy properly. It is enough in itself to betray her origin."

"You really alarm me. Should it come to her knowledge that you speak so!"

The remonstrance served only to draw his anger upon herself.

"Do you take me for a madman, or a savage?" he retorted. "Do you think I cannot command myself before the woman?"

The specimen he was giving of his power of self-restraint was not calculated to tranquillize his wife, but her silent fears had a better effect than her expostulations. Though too proud to own it, he saw the justice of her apprehensions, and his next words, after an interval of gloomy thought, were, "It is no trifle; it is a specimen of the annoyances we have to expect; nevertheless I know how to conduct myself before her."

"But if you would not *think* so very severely," Maria now ventured to interpose. "It is this that I fear. Do endeavour to be rather less rigorous in judgment; consider her age, and, after all, what a trifling defect is bad taste in dress!"

"Bad taste in every thing," he rejoined. "I have already told you it was not merely the thing itself which so disgusted me. Let her disfigure other people's children, if she will; but to bring it to MY boy!"

The forcible emphasis on the possessive pronoun renewed Mrs. Falconbridge's alarm, but she was mute.

The Colonel composed himself again.

"Let it pass," he said, with dignity; "but forbear apologies: they only tend the more to provoke me."

She sought to accommodate herself better to his humour.

"It was an unhappy choice, certainly. I was grieved to see his dear little head buried under that heap of cord and tassel."

"Don't let me see it again," said the father, in rekindling impatience. "I won't answer for myself if I do. Tell the woman to keep him out of my sight while he is condemned to wear it. And now for this delectable dinner, the very thought of which is enough to make one vow a month's fast!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE party assembled at the appointed hour, forming the very number which has been pronounced best adapted for true social enjoyment. But four individuals may bring together many conflicting inclinations. Two of these were so markedly opposed to each other as to inspire their companions with no little dread as to the harmony of the meeting. The better and the worser qualities of host and guest were too likely to come in contact—his fastidious refinement with her utter deficiency in that quality, her sociable temper with his morose *hauteur*.

Miss Langley apologized, after her manner, for the inconvenience to which she had subjected her entertainers.

"People don't like altering a dinner-hour, I know; but after all, if one's hungry, it can hardly come too soon. And I should hope, Colonel, your sport gives you an appetite. That's your object in following it, I suppose."

Hardly could he compel his features into something like an answering smile; but it was enough: she assumed her place in perfect satisfaction. But her approving glance at the appointments of the table occasioned Mrs. Falconbridge considerable anxiety. Though always accustomed to splendour, Miss Langley had never learned to regard it with even apparent indifference. No tribute to her vanity on that score was ever found unacceptable, and there was reason to fear that, in her character of guest, she might freely bestow what she so willingly received. The Colonel would have held himself degraded by the mere supposition that such compliments would have flattered him. But it might be that the savoury steam of the soup diverted the stranger's attention from the handsome family plate, for the danger was escaped: a worse remained, however, in the entertainment itself. Colonel Falconbridge, despising Epicurism

in those of his own sex, absolutely abhorred it in women. In this point, above all, was Miss Langley an offender: she expressed her approbation of the repast with a *gusto* which his wife well knew would be alone sufficient to ensure his aversion.

"Maria, you quite underrated your cook. This is all quite as it should be: I never ate a better *pâté*."

These, and other such encomiums, formed the substance of her discourse, varied occasionally by annoying exhortations to her companions.

"Miss Mansfield, I'm quite concerned to see you eat so little. Do taste this fricandeau—it is superb! As for you, Maria, if I had you at Beechwood again! Colonel, you really should exert your authority: such a want of appetite is alarming."

A grim smile crossed his countenance as he answered, "I cannot say I think so. Ladies are framed to live on light aliment; so, at least, I find it agreeable to suppose."

The look and tone so pointedly conveyed rebuke to the contrary habits of his guest, that Mrs. Falconbridge blushed both for him and for

her. But the sarcasm apparently passed unheeded by its object.

"It is astonishing," she observed, "how possessed the faculty all are in these days with the notion of dieting their patients, pretending to trace all disorders to—what is it they call it?—dys—dysp——"

"Dyspepsia," reluctantly suggested Mrs. Falconbridge.

"Dyspepsia? Thank you, my dear, that's the word—which means in plain English, I'm told, nothing more than indigestion! For my part, I think it all nonsense. Excess, no doubt, may be hurtful; but, taken in moderation, I believe there's no harm in any sort of food."

"Moderation!" thought the Colonel. "Well, all terms are relative: among women of her class this may be moderation!"

"Do you know, Maria," pursued Miss Langley, "your friend Dr. Percival and I have had quite a quarrel upon this question? He's not my man now."

"I am sorry to hear it," replied Mrs. Falconbridge, "for I think very highly of him."

"So do I, too, in his general practice; but he does not understand my particular case. He brought me through that severe attack, no doubt; and if it were to come again—which Heaven forbid!—I don't know but that I should send for him; but for constant attendance he doesn't answer. I found a little man at Torquay who understood my constitution much better: he saw at once I should not bear lowering."

Catherine, fearing that the conversation, or rather monologue, might take a turn even more disagreeable than that on which it had begun, here interposed, making Torquay the text of so many inquiries as to oblige Miss Langley to speak of something not connected with eating. Mrs. Falconbridge, encouraged by her success, readily joined in discourse. The Colonel himself began to think of coming to their aid, when an unlucky mistake threw every thing wrong again. Mrs. Falconbridge inquired after one of her old acquaintances at Beechwood, of whom she had heard nothing for some time.

"How is he?" rejoined Miss Langley. "Why, la! child, haven't you heard the man's dead?"

"No, indeed," answered Mrs. Falconbridge, in a tone of feeling, which nevertheless had no effect in checking the merriment which the inquiry had excited. The Colonel sat erect, in patient martyrdom, as though such boisterous and unbeseeming mirth jarred on every fibre of his frame; nor had his wife any spirit for further attempts. Catherine was not naturally much inclined to talking, and the secluded life she had led of late years had tended to make her habitually silent; but on this emergency she made unwonted efforts. When the dessert appeared she took occasion to speak of the horticultural glories of Beaulieu, thinking that a topic likely to interest the mistress of Beechwood. Nor was she mistaken. Miss Langley, who took pride in the skill of her own head-gardener, listened with attention, quickened by a feeling of rivalry, and did not seem to observe the taciturnity of her host and hostess. It might pass, Catherine hoped, as the necessary consequence of her having introduced a subject on which they could have little or nothing to say.

The time of separation came at length, much

to the relief of three, at least, of the party. Miss Langley intimated her intention of retiring to her room for an hour's repose, a practice to which she had been long addicted. But the affair was not settled so soon as might have been expected. Some time elapsed before she could think the cushions of the couch well adjusted, the light duly shaded, and the room so arranged as to ensure perfect quiet; she professed, indeed, never to sleep at this time, but still she "must have all things comfortable." At last Mrs. Falconbridge found herself at liberty to withdraw, and seek the solace of her friend's sympathy. But Fate denied her that comfort: Catherine was not in the drawing-room; it was occupied solely by the Colonel. Not being much inclined, just then, for a conjugal *tête-à-tête*, she turned away, thinking he could hardly have observed her having opened the door. But retreat was impracticable: he looked up, with the stern demand, "Is that you, Maria?"

Unable to deny her own identity, she reluctantly entered the room.

"I want to speak to you," he said, in the same morose tone.

She stood prepared to listen accordingly, but, as he continued silent, said, with an effort to seem at ease, "You found our first dinner rather trying, I am afraid? So did I also; but Catherine supported us so well that I hope no offence has been taken. We shall do better another time."

The Colonel, seated on the sofa in an attitude of gloomy rumination, muttered some reply which probably was not meant to be intelligible. Her heart quailed. Was every day to be like this?

He raised his head at length, and said, looking at her fixedly, "I wish to know how long this state of things is to last."

"I really hardly understand you. She proposed, I believe, to remain some time; but it depends probably on——"

"I want no more advice on that head," he interrupted, speaking with yet greater severity: "I *can* endure it"—drawing a deep breath. "Penance, hard penance as it is, I can support

it. Not, however, if I am to witness this cajolery. Tell me how long you intend to afford this subtle intimate of yours the opportunity of working your ruin."

"Ruin me! Catherine ruin me!" was all she could reply.

"Ay, Miss Mansfield, Catherine, or whatever else you call her—ruin is the word. Her ready interference passed current with you, no doubt, but it did not impose on *me*. I did not sit by without penetrating her real purpose. The plan is ingenious, and wants nothing to its success, probably, but our being pleased to allow sufficient time. But it is not new; no"—rising as he spoke, and marching majestically along the room—"you will not be the first who has had to thank a dear female friend for the destruction of a life's cares."

She could not forbear replying, with indignation, "You are hardly more just to me than to Catherine: I never employed art to win Miss Langley's favour; it dates from my childhood, as I thought you knew."

The Colonel paused in his measured steps.

"Begin how it might, it was worth retaining; and so, I suppose, you have hitherto thought. I can hardly understand how you could otherwise be such a woman's willing companion. I saw you first with her, and excused it, low-born and low-bred as she is, upon that ground: could I have surmised you had no inward sense of repugnance—that, however, is not the present question: I want only to know for what length of visit you have asked Miss Mansfield?"

"I do not know," she falteringly answered. "I mentioned no particular time."

"What!" he exclaimed, in an elevated tone, "fix no time at all! Have you really given an indefinite invitation, knowing, as you did, I should in no case be desirous of her company? Upon my word, Maria, friendship with you seems paramount to every other obligation. You have taken full advantage of my short absence. A man, I see, who would remain master of his own house should beware of leaving it."

This severe reproach utterly confounded his wife.

"If I had known you would have disapproved it——" was at length her hesitating reply, cut short at once with—

"Don't attempt excuses. You could not be really ignorant: you must have been aware that I could hardly consider a—one in Miss Mansfield's position, in short, a fitting associate for *my* wife. Her visit could not be other than unwelcome to me, even had it not been so singularly ill-timed. As it is, I am bound to take care that you and yours do not rue through life the consequences of this romantic folly."

A painful silence followed; the husband traversing the room more rapidly in the irritation of his spirits, the wife sunk in deep dejection.

The latter roused herself at last to ask, "What would you have me do? Must I actually bid my friend leave the house?"

"This is putting the case perversely," he answered, stopping short. "You understand me better: you know that I want no impropriety. I cannot suggest the exact formula. The case is awkward enough, certainly; but it is an embarrassment of your own creating, and you must extricate

yourself as you best can. Only mind to do it speedily and effectually."

"Indeed I am utterly at a loss. Were she a stranger, instead of being my dearest friend, I should not know what to say. You must find words for me: I have none of my own."

"Now is not this enough to drive a man to desperation?" said the Colonel, as if appealing to some sympathizing auditor of his own sex. "True woman's perversity! all address and readiness when she likes, helpless as an idiot if that is her whim."

His increasing vehemence quite terrified her. She hastened from his presence with no distinct object but that of escape. Her mind was bewildered by just displeasure, and anxious perplexity how to act. This was not, indeed, her first lesson in submission to his imperious temper, but it was by far the most severe. Not till now had she seen his character in full light. He had never before so openly manifested his contempt for all not belonging to his own class in society, nor could she have previously supposed him capable of harbouring a jealousy so utterly unjust. But he did; he had told her so in language but too

decisive; he had enjoined her to act on his suspicions, and how should she? what step could she take? With a head throbbing too much for serious thought, she almost mechanically took her way to a favourite morning-room. It was seldom occupied at that hour, but Catherine had withdrawn to it, taking with her little Langley, who had been brought into the drawing-room for a "good night" while his mother was absent. Seated with him on her lap, before a low, flickering fire, the shades of twilight deepening round her, she had fallen into a train of rather sombre thinking. In that state of slumber in which he now lay, lulled by the ditty she had sung, had she taken farewell of that other still dearer child, whom she could scarcely hope ever again to behold. But on the entrance of her friend all personal regrets vanished.

"Come," said she, "look at your boy—a study for a sculptor! I could not bear to dismiss him till you came."

"Is he here?" answered the mother, hurriedly. "He must go: he should have gone before, poor child."

The nurse, appearing at her mistress's summons, waited an instant in expectation that she would, according to her general custom, accompany them to the nursery.

"Don't stay: I shall come presently," said Mrs. Falconbridge; yet she stood, when the woman was gone, as if utterly unconscious why she remained. Struck by the peculiarity of her manner, Catherine's first idea was that Miss Langley had taken serious offence.

"Is any thing very wrong?" she inquired. "Does she seem to be displeased?"

"Who? Miss Langley? Oh, no; but we shall all be so miserable together!"

"I hope not. Your husband, at first, finds her manner disagreeable; that is but natural; but he will soon become used to it."

"No, no," answered Mrs. Falconbridge, with the hasty despondency of a lively temperament; "time will do nothing for us, nor can I wonder. I know not how I myself endured it. Was she always quite like this?"

"As far as my memory extends I see little difference. The change is probably more in

yourself than her. In childhood we freely give love for love, but in after-years that is not always possible: the judgment becomes more fastidious."

The exclamation "I wish I were a child again!" escaped Mrs. Falconbridge's lips; but she instantly quitted the room, afraid of betraying the deeper cause of her distress.

The emphasis with which she spoke, however, combined with her previous abstraction, suggested to Catherine some part of the truth. She could not imagine the extravagant suspicions nourished by Colonel Falconbridge, but she went so far as to conjecture that, irritated against his other guest, he might have extended his displeasure to herself, who, though she could not have given such cause of disgust, possessed not, on the other hand, that one endowment for whose sake so many defects are forgiven. And she soon saw, in the extreme coldness of his manner towards her, full conformation of her surmise. It was a species of trial as yet wholly unknown. Neither at Donnington nor Beaulieu could she be regarded as a mere intruder. The night was spent in vainly revolving

the speediest method of escaping from her present difficulties, but the morning brought unexpected relief—a letter forwarded from Beaulieu.

"How fortunate!" she exclaimed, putting it into Mrs. Falconbridge's hand: "a new engagement just as I was wishing for it."

Maria coloured, then turned pale, and could hardly restrain her tears. She declined taking the letter.

"From Miss Trevor, I suppose. I would rather not read it. Just tell me what she says."

"But it is not from her, but from one as much above her in feeling as beneath in fortune," answered Catherine, warmly.

The writer was Mrs. Markham, the housekeeper at Donnington. The intelligence that Miss Mansfield had left her charge had excited in that faithful dependant a lively concern for Lady Emma's sake. But as her informant, the Marchioness's woman, added that "it seemed to be done all on a sudden; and she could not help thinking Miss Mansfield did not well know where to go, she looked so sad," Mrs. Markham, expressing herself with the utmost delicacy as well as kindness, ven-

tured, in case Catherine should be still disengaged, to mention a family whom she knew to be desirous of finding a governess for their children. They were relations of her own, wealthy for their rank, that of the ancient yeoman class, in a remote district of Yorkshire.

"It is very kind," said Mrs. Falconbridge; "but pray, Catherine, do not close with the offer. It cannot be suitable for you: your hardships will be augmented tenfold."

"There will be less of polish, no doubt; but if I find more of sterling kindness, I shall hardly complain of the exchange. And as all things are estimated comparatively, who knows how highly they may rate me? A first-rate musician, artist, and linguist, perhaps!"

Mrs. Falconbridge's feelings were now beyond control: they found relief in a violent flood of tears. Catherine was the more distressed at witnessing her grief because she was obliged to seem ignorant of its real cause, her husband's conduct. She could only say, in the way of consolation, "Dear Maria, do not grieve: this is fortunate for me, indeed it is," and endeavour

afterwards, by apparent cheerfulness, to soothe the hidden sorrow. She was the more anxious on this point because there was reason to fear not only the Colonel's augmented displeasure, but that Miss Langley would not find herself very agreeably entertained. The latter, on her part, embarrassed the whole party by frequently remonstrating with Catherine on her unreasonable haste to depart.

"Why should she go? there could be no such hurry: the more the merrier," &c.

These friendly persuasions had no other effect than that of satisfying the Colonel of the justice of his apprehensions: since she was liked so well, what more probable than that she might be invited to fill the office of companion? a measure which, he concluded, would infallibly result in the destruction of his wife's expectations. The sad but unquestioning submission, however, with which the latter had yielded to his authority touched him at times with some sense of compunction. Having at once, and without irritating opposition, gained his object, he was willing to stretch his courtesy towards his parting guest to

all becoming limits. He took leave of her in due state at the hall-door; and it was actually in his carriage that she arrived at the station which was to be the starting-point of her long northward journey.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

CATHERINE MANSFIELD had peacefully traversed another ten years of her earthly course. The path at first had not been perfectly smooth. The Franklins prided themselves in adhering to the habits of their forefathers, on which the reception of a domestic governess was a decided innovation. The step had been taken only because their relative, Mrs. Markham, had pointed it out as the sole means of solving the difficulties of an invalid mother, unable herself to educate her children, yet much averse to send them to school. But the choice made for her somewhat startled Mrs.

John Franklin. She hardly knew what to expect from one who had but just relinquished the charge of the Marquis of Donnington's granddaughter, and her friends in general were still more shy of such a stranger. Catherine saw this, and felt, on her own side, the embarrassment of being unacquainted with the subjects of local interest to which their conversation chiefly referred. These mutual difficulties, however, were soon forgotten. She at once recognized the sterling merits of those among whom she had come; they were not slow in discovering hers; and she dwelt in happy ease in the midst of a large and kindly circle.

But an impenetrable barrier separated her from the objects of her former and still undiminished affections. The letters of Mrs. Falconbridge were very rare during that lapse of years, and very unsatisfactory. The loss of two infant daughters for some time accounted sufficiently for her great dejection; but when time had softened the effect of these calamities her tone was still the same. She spoke freely of no one but her boy, answering inquiries concerning her family with a reserve

which gave but too much cause to fear that there had been some unhappy cessation in her intercourse with them. Catherine had seen enough of the Colonel's mind, in her short visit, to make this no subject of surprise, and his public conduct strongly indicated that she had not at all misjudged him. Indomitable pride was his chief characteristic. What else could induce him, in the space of these ten years, thrice to appear as county candidate, obviously with hardly a chance of success? If the Rashleighs betrayed any sense of regret at these desperate efforts, it would be quite sufficient to alienate him from the whole connexion. His wife wrote very briefly, after his last defeat, to inform her friend that they were going abroad. Her letters became less and less frequent, and at length ceased altogether. Catherine wrote once to Mrs. Rashleigh, who answered her affectionately, but with so visible a constraint as to her absent daughter that information on the subject could not again be sought in that quarter.

Concerning Lady Emma Catherine knew even less; for the death of Mrs. Markham, shortly after she came into Yorkshire, deprived her of all

communication with Donnington. Unfortunately for her, also, the county papers seldom gave intelligence concerning any great people not connected with that part of the kingdom. Twice only was her search rewarded with articles transcribed from the London journals. The first, which appeared a few months after she left Beaulieu, was couched in these terms :—

"We believe that considerable misapprehension exists respecting a lady whose recent union with a noble Viscount, brother of a distinguished Duchess, has created so great a sensation in the circles of fashion. Without pretending to determine whether her Ladyship's almost unrivalled charms and accomplishments might not have justified her lord in descending to a *mésalliance*, we can confidently affirm that his prudence was not subjected to any such trial. We are authorized to state that the fair Viscountess is a member of an ancient family, and claims kindred with various persons of high consideration."

Was not the authority here vaunted that of Miss Lisle, triumphant in the success of those designs on Lord Coningsby which had driven Catherine

from his youthful niece? The charge of the latter must have passed to other hands. Had Lady Donnington's new choice been more happily directed? a question of lively interest, but which must remain unsolved.

Seven years elapsed before the next announcement. It ran thus:—

"The recent death of Lord Carisbrook, only surviving son of the Marquis of Donnington, has not, as stated by a contemporary, placed Sir Aubrey Vere in the position of heir-presumptive to all the estates and honours of that noble house. The ancient barony of Elvastone, having been derived from an ancestress of the noble Marquis, from whom Sir Aubrey is not descended, will devolve on his Lordship's granddaughter, Lady Emma Vere, as representative of her father, the former Lord Carisbrook. The title of Elvastone, we understand, is no empty honour, but has a very valuable rent-roll attached to it."

This intelligence greatly shocked Catherine, for Lady Donnington's sake. What must be her affliction if she survived this beloved and only son? And Lady Emma, how might she be

qualified for the responsibilities of large fortune, in addition to those of high station? another subject of deep solicitude without chance of satisfaction.

But the term of Catherine's abode in this family had now arrived. Her three elder pupils, indebted to her for a degree of accomplishments much beyond any around them, had all married under the age of twenty; and as their mother much missed their assistance in domestic concerns, she was disposed to consider the education of the two younger sufficiently finished. And Catherine frankly acknowledged that, indulged to excess as they had always been, she could not hope to bring them up to their sisters' standard. The epoch of school-room emancipation is ever joyous to youth, however mild the rule it terminates; and the felicity of Jane and Fanny Franklin was further heightened by the immediate prospect of a journey to London, in company with their father.

The party included Catherine, who, in re-entering London, was not quite hopeless of hearing or seeing something of her lost friends, on one side or the other. But the expectation was vain. A book

of reference, opened with some eagerness, gave her only blank answers as to the Falconbridges: the Colonel was not a Member of Parliament, and had no house in town. And when, with a fluttering heart, she once more found herself in Grosvenor Square, the stately dwelling of the Donningtons might be then untenanted for all that she could see of its inmates.

The journey, therefore, as regarded her own personal interests was a disappointment; but she consoled herself by entering into the keen enjoyment of her young companions. This vast and ever-increasing city, so often reproached, and, it must be owned, not altogether unjustly, with want of beauty—with being, in proportion to its size, scant of fine edifices, built of poor, perishable material, mean and irregular in general architecture—was yet magnificent far beyond the most vivid imaginings of these north-country maidens. Seven days was the period allotted for their stay: had it been prolonged for as many weeks, their wonder and pleasure might have been still unexhausted. But they had arrived at a season when it was invested with

an attraction new to its accustomed inhabitants, and drawing thither an eager influx of strangers from all parts of the civilized world. The first Great Exhibition had just opened, offering a spectacle which may since have been surpassed, in many respects, by others of a similar kind in this and in a neighbouring capital, but which, in being the *first*, possessed a power to astonish and to charm never to be rivalled. True it was, after all, in point of fact, as cavillers did not fail to remark, only an immense bazaar, a prodigious assortment of rich merchandize, almost every variety of which might be seen elsewhere arranged for ordinary sale. But those treasures of all lands, displayed in tasteful distribution beneath long, light, graceful arcades, produced an effect wholly novel—absolutely dazzling in splendour.

The two sisters, from the moment of their entrance, were in a fever of rapture, which was yet further augmented by the presence of Royalty —of a happy mother, and then most happy wife, partaking daily in the pleasure of her subjects, and studying, in careful detail, objects on which they could themselves bestow only a hurried and

undiscriminating gaze. Their audible exclamations of delight at first somewhat disturbed Catherine, but she soon found that people in general were too much occupied with their own surprise and curiosity to take much heed of those sentiments in their neighbours. If, now and then, they somewhat exceeded in this point, their fresh country hue and simplicity of air sufficiently excused them with the generality of auditors, and would even awaken in those who happened to be particularly good-natured a kindly sympathizing smile. Once only did she detect any sign that these exuberant raptures had provoked ill-natured observation. As they rested beside the great fountain, Fanny, always the more eager of the two in speech and movement, exclaimed aloud, "Oh, if I did but know the names of one-half the things I see!"

At this passionate aspiration a young lady, standing near, turned round to fix upon the speaker's face a pair of very bold black eyes, with a poignant expression of ridicule. It was lost upon its immediate object, but not upon Catherine, who repeated, in a gentle under-tone,

her not infrequent admonition, "Speak lower, my dear."

This checked the flow of girlish vivacity for an instant, but it took another direction.

"I'm tired of sitting here," she cried: "let us go up again to the galleries."

"Oh, not yet, Fanny!" pleaded Jane: "I'm tired with walking."

"But do for one moment. I saw something there just now more beautiful than any thing! I can't rest till you've seen it too."

She rose hastily as she spoke: they followed slowly, while she hurried on as fast as jostling crowds would permit her to the special point of attraction. The gorgeous fabrics of India, stiff with interwoven gold, had fascinated her sight at the first glimpse. "Here they are! Are they not splendid?" she exclaimed in her highest note of admiration, turning to claim her sister's approval. But a strong revulsion of feeling came over her: she encountered the broad stare of those same black eyes which had already scanned her, and their language this time did not escape her apprehension. Conscious that she was sub-

jected to ridicule, a flush of shame suffused her frank, innocent countenance. But it yielded instantly to one of a yet more painful character—that of absolute alarm.

"Oh, where are they?" she cried. "I've lost them!" This consternation did but provoke greater derision in the young lady already referred to, but it awakened other sentiments in another.

"You have lost your party," said she, consolingly. "Don't be frightened: it often happens here. You will soon find them again."

"Oh, no, I sha'n't! I don't know where to look!" rejoined Fanny, in a distress piteous from its obvious intensity, however far it might exceed all rational cause.

"Did they come up with you?" inquired the same gentle interlocutor.

"I thought they were following me, but I don't know. Oh, where—where can they be?"

"Come here, and look down: you will have a wide view."

It was wide, commanding both nave and transept; but poor Fanny's eyes, bewildered by her panic, could not have distinguished the objects

of her search though they had been just beneath her. They were, however, close at hand. A voice almost as plaintive as her own now exclaimed, "Oh, Fanny, have we met you at last?"

The affectionate, simple-minded sisters, utterly new to their present circumstances, greeted each other almost as if one or both had escaped from some frightful peril.

Catherine now approached, not quite in so excited a state of mind, but sufficiently glad of the reunion.

Fanny went eagerly towards her, saying, as she did so, "I won't leave you again, indeed, Miss Mansfield!"

The name, spoken as usual rather too much aloud, was heard by one who was now withdrawing from the scene, satisfied with its happy termination. She paused, then advanced, though somewhat hesitatingly, towards Catherine, looked earnestly upon her, and said, "Pardon me if I am mistaken, but your name, I hear, is Mansfield: mine is Vere."

Catherine's heart actually bounded with the joyful, instantaneous recognition. It was not sur-

prising that she should herself be remembered: she was but little altered in the last ten years, but the child had passed into womanhood. Yet it was the same sweet face. The soft blue eyes, the richly golden hair, the tint of blended roses, and, more than all, that peculiar expression, open to all, deeply tender for some—these would have fixed identity though the name had been unuttered. Catherine really could not speak. She could only take the proffered hand, and press it with intense feeling. Lady Emma's response testified her full reciprocation of the sentiments so conveyed, and her smile was brightly happy as in years gone by. But this was no time or place for discourse. A very few words were spoken, and she disappeared to rejoin a large party, including one as little changed by time in point of disposition as she herself was—no other than her early acquaintance Miss Dallas, whose derisive notice of the rustic Fanny had just awakened her own kindly sympathy, and who now gazed from a little distance in amused astonishment at what had ensued.

CHAPTER II.

"WAS it more than a very happy dream?" Catherine was almost ready to ask herself on awaking next morning. But full certification that it was a real event was soon put into her hands in the shape of a letter from Lady Emma.

"My dearest Friend,

"You told me yesterday that you were now disengaged, which gives me reason to hope for an unlooked-for happiness. Affairs have taken an unexpectedly favourable turn. Lady Donnington and I have an object in common. Her great calamity having much affected her health, particularly in weakening her sight, she has long

been in search of a lady willing to undertake the office of reader and companion. Two or three trials have been made; but remembering, as you doubtless do, the peculiarities of her character, much aggravated by her affliction, you will not be surprised that they were failures. On hearing of our meeting, the idea that you were exactly suited to her wishes seemed instantly to strike her, and she has authorized me to make them known to you. You will surely come back to us? Now that we have met again I feel more than ever what a loss I had in you, and cannot endure the thought of another separation. I have no time to urge more, but am most impatient for your consent.

"Ever your gratefully affectionate

"EMMA VERE."

Few in her position would have declined such an offer; but Catherine's joy was such as would hardly allow her, in addressing Lady Donnington, to employ only the terms suited to an arrangement of mutual convenience. She was unspeakably happy; and Jane and Fanny, though crying

heartily at parting from her, were much consoled by the knowledge that she was going to live again with Lady Emma Vere, whose countenance and manner had at once fascinated their warmest regard.

It was evening when Catherine again entered the mansion. A well-remembered porter rose to give her admittance, his hair more blanched, his step more feeble than of yore, but looking still as if the intervening period had been to him one of ease and comfort, though it had brought so sad a change to his lord and lady. The servants, in general, were respectful: her former residence in the family was not quite forgotten, and the circumstance of a recall proved that she stood high in the esteem of their superiors. Lady Emma's waiting-woman, in particular, whom she had left as a young girl, and who had now risen into being a person of importance in the household, was evidently rejoiced to see her again. Her mistress had entrusted her with a little note: these were its words:—

"How glad I am to think that I shall find you here at my return! I do not think I shall be late,

so, in case you *should* happen to be wakeful, I have directed Barnes to arrange my dressing-room for your comfort. I long for an opportunity of full confidence—not another instant now."

Lady Donnington was mournfully changed: her wasted features and drooping form attested the weight of her affliction more plainly than her sable garb. Lady Emma had been as much surprised as rejoiced at her really eager desire for Catherine's companionship, remembering, as she did very clearly, the occurrences of her childhood; but the motive was clearly discernible —the mother pined to speak with one who remembered her lost child. Reserved as she had been in her happier days, she was now, on the one subject which engrossed her thoughts, inclined to be fondly diffuse. She told minutely the history of her son's illness and decease, and, soothed by her auditor's unaffected sympathy, had seldom wept with so great a sense of relief. But, unfortunately on another theme the same unison of feeling was not to be expected: the Marchioness spoke with all her former harshness of Lady Emma, characterizing her as "weak, vain, worldly."

"My only comfort is," she said, "that I cannot accuse myself of having contributed to the growth of her defects. You heard, I suppose, the result of those systematic artifices which induced me to place her under the charge of Lady Coningsby." A shade of transient colour appeared on her Ladyship's wan cheek as she pronounced these words, testifying, even now, to the liveliness of her indignation at the time to which she referred.

"Yes," she continued, "there was a regular cabal; but well did the Duchess of Ilminster punish herself for her share in it! It has proved a bitter mortification to her for the rest of her life. Such a sister-in-law! However, as regarded Lady Emma, I did the best I could to atone for the error into which I had been betrayed: I placed her in the hands of a most excellent woman. If any human care could have benefited her, it must have been that of Mrs. Simmons. But what has been the result? She plunges at once into folly! Like her mother—like her aunt! I am sorry to say so, but I assure you I have not at all overstated the case."

"But she is so young!" Catherine ventured to interpose.

"Miss Mansfield," answered the Marchioness, emphatically, "I know the world, though by choice I have kept apart from it. Those who have been drawn into its vortex are seldom rescued: as they begin, so they continue, and so they end!"

The subject was pursued no further, Lady Donnington's verdict having been thus authoritatively delivered. She herself retired early: Catherine awaited Lady Emma's return in her dressing-room. She was abundantly supplied with books, but all were of the lightest description, and not remarkably good specimens of their kind. One was distinguished by a mark: she opened to that page, and found it further pointed out for observation by marginal pencilling. She carefully read the passage, an elaborate sketch of the hero of the tale. What did the marks against it signify? Was it the author's style or sentiments which seemed thus to be noted for approval? Neither, in her opinion, merited the compliment; but her interest was so far excited as to the character of the

work that she read on and on, pausing only when another, yet more powerful,. was awakened: in the comparative stillness of a London night she heard a carriage approaching the house—halting. In a few instants Lady Emma was in the room, greeting her with the warmest demonstrations of affection.

"Wait a few instants, Barnes," she said: "I will soon summon you."

But she then sank into a chair, the expression of gladness vanished from her countenance, and she did not seem inclined to speak.

"You are fatigued," said Catherine, looking at her with fond concern.

"A little," Lady Emma answered, beginning to divest herself of some of the ornaments she had worn. "But how selfish I was to ask you to keep such a vigil! You must have found it very tedious."

"No. Barnes, you see, has been very attentive: she has ransacked your library for my entertainment."

Lady Emma looked hastily at the pile of volumes.

"Several of those are not mine," said she. Then, as she perceived which it was that had drawn Catherine's attention, the bloom which dissipation had banished suddenly returned, as on some secret impulse of feeling.

"*That* is one of Elizabeth's—Miss Dallas I mean. She sent it to me only this afternoon. I have hardly opened it."

"The marks I observed in it are hers, then?" Catherine rather eagerly rejoined.

"Yes," replied Lady Emma, with still heightened colour.

Her confusion soon subsided, but a fit of abstraction followed.

It was impossible not to wonder at a behaviour so little according with the eagerness she had expressed for an opportunity of discourse. She herself was evidently conscious of the inconsistency, for she suddenly exclaimed, throwing back the rich tresses which partially shaded her face, "I know not how it is, I find I cannot talk at all to-night! Has—has not Lady Donnington spoken to you of me?" she continued, after a few minutes of utter silence. "But I need not ask—nor how! I know

she has painted me in very dismal colours. I will not complain of her: I feel much for her, though I know she does not believe it. But did she tell you under whose care she placed me after my Aunt Coningsby left me so hastily? A widow lady — Mrs. Simmons — oh, really a dreadful woman!"

"Lady Donnington certainly did mention her," answered Catherine, "but" (with a smile) "in very different terms."

"Do not trust to that. I alone can describe her justly. So cold, so formal, so rigid—Lady Donnington herself was, then at least, really lenient in comparison with her. I shudder at the mere remembrance!"

Again she was silent; but presently resumed, "It is really impossible for me to please Lady Donnington: she holds all social entertainments as so many sins; and I *must* mingle in them, and cannot help liking them too."

"At your age you could hardly avoid them, and, I hope, will learn to like them in moderation only. That doctrine is not too rigid, is it?"

"No; oh, no! I knew yours would not be. I

used to think of you so often when Mrs. Simmons was denouncing 'worldly pleasures,' as she called them. Mine was not a *very* happy life after you left me, I assure you."

There was an indescribable something in her manner while she thus spoke which impressed Catherine with a suspicion that it was not merely the past troubles of the period of education that were in her thoughts—not only Mrs. Simmons's severe maxims, nor even Lady Donnington's ; and the idea was strengthened by a deep blush that rose to her cheek when she caught an affectionate but observant glance directed towards her.

"Poor Barnes!" she exclaimed; "I really am inexcusable for keeping her up so late—and you——"

"To-morrow will be a better time for talking," said Catherine, rising to withdraw; "though, for my own part, I am not at all tired, not being returned from a ball."

They parted accordingly, Lady Emma's manner considerably embarrassed, though not less affectionate. Catherine was not surprised that the intended "full confidence" had not been

reposed in her at this first interview; so very long a separation must render it more difficult than could beforehand be imagined. "But it will come," she thought: "I shall be to her again something of what she has been to me ever since I first came into this room."

It was the very same she had occupied on her original introduction to the family—strange then: she now looked around her really as on an old and favoured haunt.

CHAPTER III.

THE Marchioness, next morning, introduced her new companion to her step-daughter, as one formerly well known; but the latter scarcely condescended to acknowledge the faintest recollection—a mode of conduct perfectly answering to Catherine's own clear recognition of her Ladyship. She saw in her at home one unchanged by years, except by the loss of beauty, and, could she have followed her into society, would have found her, to the ridicule of the race now springing up, pursuing still, with desperate pertinacity, the matrimonial designs of her youth.

Lady Emma likewise came in; but the reception she met with was not likely, Catherine could not but fear, to incline her often to join the party.

In the forbidden range of "worldliness" Lady Donnington now included not only all lively pastimes, but all discourse which was not of the most serious description, and she took every possible occasion of condemning those who did not hold a similar opinion. Lady Emma nevertheless remained till the stated hour when, as she knew, the Marchioness would join her husband, that she might secure Catherine wholly to herself.

"Now come with me," said she, "where only I can think and speak with freedom. Do you wonder that I seldom come here?"

Her own pretty room exhibited various tokens of occupation—embroidery, a harp and music-desk, a profusion of notes on the writing-table.

"You are looking for books," she observed. "Barnes did not make a very good selection last night: I will show you some I prefer."

But at that instant Miss Dallas was announced. Lady Emma testified no great pleasure.

"She comes often at this time," said she: "pray do not go away."

Catherine remained accordingly, the rather

because she wished to discover what degree of friendship really existed between the young ladies. The conversation was conducted on Lady Emma's side in the easiest manner possible, all that she said being addressed equally to both companions; but Miss Dallas carefully marked the difference of degree. She affected a tone of particular caution, using many indirect allusions, and even sometimes proceeding so far as to whisper her communications. But on one point she condescended to be less ambiguous—the approaching drawing-room, at which Lady Emma was to be presented.

"Your dress has been sent home, I suppose?" said she. "Let me see it directly."

"Are you really serious?"

"Certainly; it was my chief object in coming."

"Your solicitude, then, quite puts me to the blush. I never remember making any such request in your case."

"I always tell you, my dear, you do not fully reciprocate my friendship. However, this is a special occasion. You will not be presented a second time until"—here she again whispered, in

the manner appropriate to the tenderest confidence, holding her friend by the hand. Lady Emma disengaged herself very hastily, to ring the bell. Barnes triumphantly produced her lady's first court-dress, which she was fully persuaded would far eclipse that of every other. Indeed, considering the deep deliberation which that autocrat of fashion the Duchess of Ilminster had devoted to the subject, there was every reason to suppose that it must be, in design at least, a very perfect specimen of art. Nevertheless Miss Dallas professed herself disappointed in every respect—in the material, the make, the colour.

"Blue!" said she: "nothing very original there. Every girl with a tolerably fair complexion appears first in that. I wonder that her Grace's excellent invention could not devise something newer. Neither can I compliment Madame Desmoulins on her part—no; really, not at all!"

She then proceeded to state her objections in elaborately technical terms, saying, in conclusion, "My dear Emma, I do assure you, you have great cause to complain of Madame. She has done you no justice. Now, really, in your case this is an

injury to be resented: you ought to take her sharply to task."

"Really," replied Lady Emma, "till you so obligingly pointed out its defects, I thought I had reason to be very well satisfied with it. Take it away now, Barnes: we have talked about it quite long enough."

The waiting-woman, having sufficient keenness to perceive the real cause of Miss Dallas's disapprobation, indulged in a sly glance of contempt as she bore away the beautiful and only too becoming dress.

"And now let me tell you," said Miss Dallas, "I, for one, cannot rest till I have properly admonished Madame Desmoulins. She deserves to lose your custom at the onset."

"Pray, Elizabeth, give yourself no concern about it: the Duchess gave directions, and, as she is satisfied, there can be no great mistake."

"Only let me put it to the proof. If I do not bring Madame in all humility to acknowledge her delinquencies, let me be clad by a village sempstress all the rest of my days!"

"Well, at all events, there is no remedy: the

dress being complete, there is no use in saying any thing about it."

"Pardon me, there is every use: it will enforce more attention another time, and benefit the community as well as yourself. Have you no public spirit?"

"The Duchess would be displeased. I dare not ask her to take me there for such a purpose."

"But why should she know it? My carriage is at the door: it may be done in perfect secrecy."

"I am not fond of secrecy. Besides, I am not, like you, quite independent: my movements are under authority."

"Poor thing!" in a pitying tone.

"I am not sensible of any grievance, nevertheless. The Duchess conveys me wherever I wish to go."

"I am glad you are so well satisfied: so should not I be. Allow me in this instance, however, to play chaperon, and let the act be formally sanctioned, that you may not be caught in transgression. Send to ask the Marchioness, like a good, dutiful little girl."

Lady Emma was unwilling to follow this counsel, and confidently expected a refusal. Catherine,

however, who acted as envoy, brought back an assent, but clogged, she was reluctantly obliged to confess, with the condition that she should herself accompany Lady Emma. The latter, conscious that she must be averse thus, as it were, to obtrude herself on one who treated her with marked *hauteur*, was the more disinclined to the expedition. But Miss Dallas was firm to her purpose.

"Come, then, without delay," said she; adding, in an audible whisper, "the duenna will not be much in our way. But what an absurd punctilio of Lady Donnington's!"

They found Madame Desmoulins in the utmost hurry of her calling, surrounded by ladies, each claiming her full attention, which was at the same instant unavoidably diverted by the receipt of notes and messages from others. Lady Emma was touched with compassion.

"I cannot bear to speak to her, Elizabeth: it would be really too hard, beset as she now is."

A derisive smile only noticed the scruple.

"Look there!" said Miss Dallas: "you see the difference between that dress and your own, I hope."

"It is not enough to make the alteration worth while."

"Trust me, Madame shall acknowledge that it is."

But they could not immediately prefer their complaint, no matron present being inclined to abridge her own conference for the convenience of any baronet's or any marquis's daughter. The half-open door of an adjoining room disclosed to view a number of young women busily plying their needles, while dresses in various states of advancement lay around.

"See!" said Lady Emma: "how hard it must be to work, seeing all the time so much more to be done! I am sure it would quite dishearten me. I should throw down my task in despair."

"A busy scene, indeed," answered Miss Dallas, carelessly. "Madame has immense custom. But why do you look so terribly shocked? The more they have to do, the better for them: they get their bread by it, you know. And where is the mighty hardship? It is only sitting still, after all."

"Such close confinement must be hurtful. They look, in general, unhealthy and sad."

"I really don't see it;" putting up her glass as for a closer scrutiny. "Besides, if they do, it is no fault of ours—quite unavoidable, unless you would have us return to the good old custom of sewing our own garments. But perhaps you have caught a touch of the 'Donnington,' and are doubting whether it be not very near a deadly sin to go to Court."

"I am doubting nothing but whether I ought to have come here to require needless alterations. It will all tell in increasing their labour."

"How dreadfully sensitive you are! You would be contented, then, to take the things just as they turn them out of hand? We might as well give no orders at all. What do we pay for, if we have no right to suggest improvement?"

Lady Emma was at that moment called to the exercise of this valuable prerogative: Madame Desmoulins, just released from the tormenting particularities of one of her employers and from the displeasure of another, who charged her both with incapacity and neglect, came forward smilingly, having little apprehension of complaint in this

case. On finding herself mistaken she expressed her astonishment in pathetic terms.

"Really, she did think that dress must be very much *approve.* If her Ladyship would be so good as to *tell* the mistake——"

Lady Emma felt not a little awkward at having to substantiate imaginary grievances, none of which had entered into her own head. Having made out her case as well as she could by the aid of an unscrupulous prompter, she would at once have hurried away; but Miss Dallas was otherwise disposed.

"Nay, my dear," said she; "after all my zeal in your behalf, you will surely allow me time to attend to my own concerns! My fancy habit is finished, Madame, I suppose?"

No, far from it; but, as this unhappy victim of fine-lady tyranny ventured to represent, it had not been ordered to be ready before the end of the week.

"True," answered Miss Dallas, with much *nonchalance;* "I believe I did say so; but—in short, I want it to-morrow, that's all: you have only to urge your people a little."

Madame assured the young lady that they were already working their hardest, night and day.

"Put on a few more hands, then: manage it as you will; but understand, Madame, this is a point with me—I must not be disobeyed. I am ready now, Emma."

The latter felt deeply ashamed of her cruel selfishness; but the ill-used *marchande-de-modes*, reviving at the prospect of her own immediate freedom, ascribed all she had been compelled to endure to "that *gout exquis* which do make every one who do have it so hard to be *please!*"

Miss Dallas on her own part treated the compliment with infinite disdain.

"That is what I hate in these Frenchwomen," said she, as they drove off—"their oily smoothness can never be disturbed! A countrywoman of our own would have been in a blaze with half as much as I gave her! And then they are always so intolerably self-satisfied. Madame evidently thought we should be highly flattered with her praise!"

"And so we might be. It surely has its worth in professional questions."

"Well, I can allow for her being a little over-civil at last, for she began with downright obstinacy. But she soon found she had more than her match in me. I never will be ruled by the people I employ. Now you are just one to spoil them: why did not you desire to have your own dress also?"

"Because, as you know, it will not be wanted till Friday week."

"Ah, true! and, now I think of it, perhaps not even then."

There was a quick look of surprise in reply.

"I meant, my dear"—significantly—"that I supposed you would not greatly care to be there."

"I do not understand you," Lady Emma answered, her colour rising as she spoke. "Why should we not be there? We are asked."

"No doubt, in common with all the rest of your species. It will be just one of the Delaval House mobs. I meant only, my dear"—in a tone of affected sympathy, very little lowered, however—"that *he* not being there——"

She broke off, as having said enough for a hint. Lady Emma was visibly distressed between

anxiety to understand her meaning and a wish not to betray that feeling. Catherine looked out of the window, and wished herself out of the carriage. But Miss Dallas still proceeded, as in allusion to something already known.

"This little fraternal *fracas*, you know——"

All self-restraint yielded to alarm. "What has happened?" Lady Emma asked, with quivering lip.

"Why, in consequence of that little affair in court the other day—my dear love, you look quite ill—faint, and I've nothing about me! Miss Mansfield, have you?—salts? any thing?" But Catherine afforded only the service really needed —the appearance, at least, of not noticing what was passing.

"I am not ill, Elizabeth," answered Lady Emma, and her tone was that of repressed displeasure, not without cause.

"Well, I declare I was quite frightened!" rejoined Miss Dallas: "you became suddenly so very wan. It quite put out of my head what I was saying. What *could* we have been talking of? Oh, that foolish little story! But,

my dear, I could not have imagined you had not heard of it! Nothing else has been talked of since: all the papers are full of it."

"I seldom look at the papers," replied Lady Emma, in a voice that could not be rendered steady.

"Indeed! I often find them highly entertaining, especially in the law reports. But in this case they are quite provoking. Such monstrous exaggeration!"

"Very likely; it is very common; but—what was it?"

"Well, really, nothing at all, properly understood; but if you are so anxious—curious, I mean—you shall hear all. There has been a trial—nothing dreadful, nothing shameful, only a case of forgery—not *his*, however; only his *valet's;* and now, perhaps, you are satisfied, and don't want to hear any more?"

There was no answer in words, but the narrator either saw or was resolved to see, in the countenance of her auditor, a desire that she should proceed.

"The personage in question, whose name is

one of those not the most easily remembered—I really forget whether it is Jones or Thompson—had, it seems, been long in the family, and was much trusted; so that it caused a great commotion when, one fine morning, it came to light that he had committed a forgery, not on his master—that would ill have answered his purpose—but on the Most Noble himself."

"The Duke?" said Lady Emma, as if involuntarily.

"On no less a magnate, who, unfortunately too, is one of those who hold it a duty to society not to let offenders escape. So the poor wretch was apprehended, and the trial came on last Thursday, I think, and he was convicted. But that's nothing very dreadful: it's no hanging matter now, you know."

"No; but——" Lady Emma began, and stopped.

"You wonder, I dare say, how poor Lord Henry——" Here she herself paused, with an expression of dismay, as if conscious of having betrayed a name. But Catherine strongly suspected the apparent inadvertence to have been designed; and Lady Emma, well knowing that

it was, would not meet the apologetical glance directed towards her.

"It is very hard upon him, certainly," said Miss Dallas, "to have his name mixed up in the matter; but so it is. The prisoner's counsel, knowing little of the habits of gentlemen, but having some talent for working on the sort of people used as jurors, made a fine declamation on what he called the extreme hardship of the case, transferring the blame from the culprit's own shoulders to those of his master, who, he did not scruple to imply, set him no very excellent example in his own practices, really tempting him to dishonesty by not paying him his wages. An audacious fellow, was he not, to say all this?"

Again she paused, but Lady Emma was perfectly mute.

"However, being, as I said, a clever advocate, he contrived out of these illiberal insinuations to make an harangue which had great effect on all the ignorant people in court. The jury especially, I understand, seemed to consider it very eloquent and pathetic, so it answered his purpose extremely well, and there was a re-

commendation to mercy. Indeed, Miss Shawe, who was there with her mother, told me that, angry as she was at his freedom in speaking of the higher classes in general—to say nothing of the particular object of his attack—she could not help acknowledging he did it very well. One rather likes, sometimes, to be a little exasperated. I wish very much I had asked Papa to take me: they say every one should be at a trial once in their lives; and in this case, having some friendly interest—well, but after all, the oration, once over, would have signified little or nothing, but for that engine of all mischief the press! The story, of course, was caught up, and descanted upon most edifyingly. This was wormwood to the pride of the Duke, who values himself on regularity of payment. So, viewing the matter most unreasonably, as reflecting disgrace on the whole house of Delaval, he reprehended his brother very sharply. There's no doubt whatever of that, nor of the other's having resented his interference with spirit. Every body blames the elder: the case by no means merited a severe lecture. If the man had been paid, no doubt it would have been better, and

this disturbance might have been spared. But who can wonder? How these unfortunate younger brothers get on at all is the mystery! The only marvel is, when one comes to reflect, that affairs of this kind do not happen every day. However, my dear," she concluded, tenderly pressing Lady Emma's hand, as she prepared to alight at Lord Donnington's door, "there *may* be an accommodation, after all, before the Duchess's party: don't mind it *too* much."

Lady Emma entered the house hastily, evidently desirous to shun Catherine's eyes. The latter followed slowly, in no little disturbance of mind. Her utmost efforts could not render her absolutely blind or deaf during the recent revelations: against her will she had become possessed of a secret deeply affecting the happiness of the object of her fondest affection. Miss Dallas had, indeed, betrayed so much of malicious intention as to allow the hope of her having somewhat exaggerated the facts; but, with that deduction, enough remained to excite very painful solicitude. Yet so far was she from claiming Lady Emma's confidence, that she even hesitated awhile before

she could hold herself free to consult an authority open to all the world. Almost the only book now to be found in Lady Donnington's apartments which was not of a devotional cast was a "British Peerage," kept solely to afford her the melancholy solace of gazing on the name of her lost child. The book itself indicated its use by opening to that page; but Catherine sought another. From the chronicle of the Duke of Delaval's ancient house she gathered the following particulars :—

That Lord Henry Beauchamp, his Grace's only brother, had just completed his twenty-fifth year, and wrote himself M.P. It further appeared that he was probably a most unsuitable match for the heiress of a large estate, being, in point of fact, that personage proverbial for abject need, a younger brother's younger son, indebted for a special act of royal grace for the rank and style he bore, his father having died without acceding to the dukedom. To this scanty information it may be as well here to subjoin what only by degrees she came to know.

This cadet of a noble house had by his very errors obtained some celebrity in the world, and

even no small degree of favour. The expensive style of living he contrived to maintain, while at the same time, with careless pleasantry, he avowed his pecuniary difficulties, procured him in every class but too many admirers and imitators. Many of his associates, however, urged him to extricate himself from embarrassment by the ready expedient of a wealthy marriage; but, at once averse to the bond and disdaining the barter, he stedfastly withstood their officious advice. It was with no mercenary design that he approached the heiress of a considerable portion of the Donnington property, but his conduct, nevertheless, was far from honourable, for the original impulse was merely that of vanity. Not unconscious of his remarkable powers of attraction, it was very much his habit to try them on the fairest *débutante* of the season. To that distinction Lady Emma could not lay claim; but he quickly found in her a peculiar and irresistible charm. Her perfect candour and unaffected gentleness penetrated him at first with unwonted contrition, and very soon with a still more tender sentiment. Each time they met he became more anxious seriously to engage

the affections with which he had so unworthily trifled; and yet the more delightful was this intercourse because the felicity it afforded him was unsuspected. It was in general regarded as no more than one of the passing flirtations in which he was wont to indulge: one individual alone perceived him to be at last really a lover. This intelligent observer was Miss Dallas, whose keen discernment was in this instance quickened by jealousy. It was not a sentiment of rivalry: intense selfishness effectually guarded her from the dangers of imprudent passion. Vainly would he here have essayed his utmost fascinations: he could not, had he so wished, have betrayed her into a momentary forgetfulness of his disqualifications as a suitor. But she thought much of what Lady Emma herself thought not at all—the glory that would accrue to her who had enchained this volatile object of universal admiration. Deterred by envy from calling public attention to the fact, she lost no opportunity of harassing her "dearest friend" by intimating her own full possession of the secret, and by pointing out, not to warn, but to wound, the grave defects of Lord Henry's character.

It remains but to say that this attachment was still only mutually understood: no word of a binding character had been exchanged. Lord Henry knew his own position. At present the Duchess of Ilminster, well pleased to have the most agreeable man of the day in ready attendance at her call, permitted him to enjoy free intercourse with her niece; but he was quite aware that this privilege would be instantly withdrawn did he betray any intention of coming forward seriously. It was therefore his especial care, to avoid giving her cause of alarm on that point, to keep within safe limits. But Lady Emma, not versed as he was in the ways of the worldly, did not at all understand her aunt's conduct towards him, and, amidst all her dread of Lord Donnington's displeasure, fondly flattered herself that from the only one of her relatives for whom she could entertain any thing like affection her hidden passion received a tacit sanction.

CHAPTER IV.

CATHERINE, that afternoon, was intercepted on her way to her room after a drive with the Marchioness by a message from Lady Emma, whom she found reclining on a couch in her dressing-room. Her cheek was flushed, perhaps by a consciousness that Miss Dallas's wilfully indiscreet disclosures could not be forgotten, but her hand was pressed on her brow with an expression of actual pain.

"I have a severe head-ache," said she, "and I thought that on that plea I might escape this evening's infliction. Will you give me your certificate?"

"I am sorry to see you in pain, but I do not know what it is you want to avoid."

"Don't you? Why, this dinner-party. I thought the Marchioness would have mentioned it to you. I am sure she dislikes it even more than I, but I suppose she does not choose to speak her mind on the subject. It is not an affair of much trouble: we expect only two guests, Sir Aubrey and his mother; but the restraint is the same as though they were twenty. I quite dread my introduction to Lady Margaret. There is something formidable in the character ascribed to her. Fancy helps it a little perhaps—she has a fine Roman nose—but I always regard her as a living representative of Cornelia, wanting only another son."

"If all that is said of Sir Aubrey be true, she may well be content with her one."

"Yes; no doubt we have reason to be proud of him; but I cannot but think it is chiefly as being now his heir that he interests Lord Donnington; for until my poor uncle's death we had hardly any communication with them. Since then the Marquis has been anxious to be on intimate terms. He even talked last year of inviting them to Donnington, but the Marchioness would

not hear of it. Even she has failed at length, however."

Barnes here entered, charged with a message that her young lady should be ready early, as Lady Margaret was expected some time previous to dinner. A much more serious degree of indisposition than she could plead would hardly have sufficed to excuse her appearance that evening.

The true explanation of this family meeting, entirely unsuspected by Lady Emma herself, was to be found in a project by which her grandfather hoped to secure in his own posterity his ancestral honours and wealth. On his feebler character the effect of their common calamity had been far less overwhelming than on that of his wife. As years increased the weight of his personal sufferings, he had become less and less capable of entertaining deep concern even for those most closely connected with him. But the one only passion which had animated his existence, originating in self, was not extinguished. As he sat, hour after hour, silent and almost motionless, his mind was not so utterly vacant as a spectator might have

supposed. All his remaining faculties were concentred on a purpose on the success of which he calculated as assured, though for its accomplishment the consent of other parties was indispensable: by the marriage of his granddaughter and the new heir-presumptive the inheritance which his death would otherwise disunite would be preserved in perfect integrity, to be continued, perhaps, in his own descendants throughout all future ages. Lady Margaret was far from entertaining this scheme, as did his Lordship, as one fully settled and determined; but it had sometimes passed through her mind that such a match might not be undesirable for her son, if his young kinswoman were really as amiable as she was reported to be, and she therefore met the Marquis's advances the more willingly.

This mother and son were always proudly cited by those who would uphold the honour of the aristocracy. Early left a widow, she had devoted herself, heart and mind, to his education, and he had well repaid her cares. Indeed, on coming into public life his friends applauded him as having escaped some dangers into which her maternal training might have drawn him. If

she, a woman of noble enthusiasm, had exhorted him to soar above the average in political morality, he did not, in consequence, in practical experience fall the lower. Without abandoning her principles as visionary, he yet clearly perceived where they exceeded what was really attainable, and early acquired the praise due to sound judgment, no less than to high integrity.

The Marchioness and Lady Margaret had never been more than slightly known to each other, and there was something acutely painful in the renewal of their intercourse. The one saw in the other the happy mother of a living son, and he the very individual who was to enjoy what would have been the inheritance of her own. These circumstances engendered a bitterness of feeling which the truest sympathy on the part of her visitor could not allay; and she fretted exceedingly at the tardiness of the other members of the family, who left her to the penalties of a *tête-à-tête*. Lady Margaret, on her side, was so sensible of their mutual discomfort as to be actually desirous of the addition of her host's society. But his coming was but a change to another kind of pain. His manner was dis-

tressingly strange to her, and still more to his wife, who better knew his actual habits and condition. Some extraordinary impulse seemed to have partially restored his bodily powers: he walked into the room almost without assistance, and, while heartily shaking his guest's hand, contemplated her with a smile of half-bewildered satisfaction.

"My dear Lady Margaret, this is a most happy event—I may say"—moving his head emphatically—"a most auspicious event. Lady Donnington, my dear, you have no doubt assured Lady Margaret of our very peculiar pleasure in seeing her again beneath our roof."

The Marchioness, conscious of the extreme coldness of her own mode of reception, was too much embarrassed by this direct appeal to attempt reply, but his Lordship did not heed her silence.

"We do not, in general, receive company," he continued; "but relations, as we are, Lady Margaret, should be in habits of frequent intercourse: it is a duty we owe each other."

He had proceeded thus far with what was, in him, an extreme degree of rapidity; but now, as if

spent by an uncommon effort, his manner became slower and less coherent than was his wont.

"And Sir Aubrey—we are to have, I understood—I thought we might expect to enjoy his company also?"

"No; I am afraid there is little chance of his having the pleasure of joining me here. At this period of the session Wednesdays and Saturdays are the only open days."

"Oh, to be sure! ay, very true!" rejoined the Marquis: "an unfortunate forgetfulness on our part—very unfortunate! We should have remembered this circumstance, my dear; we should have remembered it. You see it has deprived us of Sir Aubrey's company."

The Marchioness faintly attempted an expression of regret, but it was lost in her lord's resumption of discourse. His faculties seemed to be in a disordered state. He spoke now with more connexion, but his memory was evidently not perfectly clear.

"So many years have passed since your Ladyship has given us this pleasure," he said: "our family has undergone great changes."

Lady Margaret dreaded lest some distressing allusion to his last calamity should escape the lips of the poor old man. But the living, not the dead, now principally occupied his thoughts. Putting the aunt and niece, in his imperfect state of recollection, almost on a level in point of age, "Here are two young strangers," he said, as they entered, "who have risen up almost from their cradles since you saw them—my own daughter Arabella, and my eldest son's Emma."

"We are no strangers to each other," answered Lady Margaret, smiling pleasantly on Lady Arabella; "but as to——"

The old Marquis stared in painful bewilderment. "Do you already know my daughter?" he asked.

"Yes, Papa: we meet often in society, you know," said Lady Arabella, with no little asperity of manner; for this confusion of dates irritated her temper considerably.

"But you must introduce me *here*," interposed Lady Margaret, extending her hand so cordially to his young granddaughter that the latter's previous awe vanished at once. Full light also now broke on his Lordship's recollection.

"Yes, I mean—I meant Emma," he said: "you can never have seen *her*."

"Only as yet in crowds," answered Lady Margaret, gazing with real interest on the sweet, open countenance never before so clearly before her, and secretly wishing her son had been able to accompany her. The aged nobleman, on his part, was transported with satisfaction at his smooth and rapid progress. The preliminaries of the proposed union seemed to him to be already adjusted, and himself in the act of ratifying the contract. A timely intimation that dinner waited his commands alone preserved him from an exceedingly premature disclosure of his views. On quitting the room, he collected his senses so far as to observe the presence of a gentleman who acted as his secretary and librarian, whom he named as "my good friend Mr. Selby."

In the after-part of the evening Catherine saw, with pleasure, that the guest was advancing in the good opinion of her youthful kinswoman. In fact, elevated as was the mind of the former, her manners were so easy that no ingenuous nature could withstand their influence. Her higher

qualities were at the same time drawn forth very distinctly by the officious assiduities of Mr. Selby. She repelled them with a steadiness of disapproval which would have effectually discouraged any one gifted with a tolerable share of delicacy. But this gentleman had settled his part in the Marquis's schemes too long to be easily turned aside. Having well studied his Lordship's turn of thought, he had penetrated his secret purpose, and, in the event of its accomplishment, reckoned securely on raising his own fortunes on those of Sir Aubrey, who all men foresaw would one day stand high in official power. To win the mother was to obtain a strong chance of interest with the son, and accordingly poor Mr. Selby laboured most indefatigably in assailing what was believed to be her weak point—pride of birth. To magnify the Veres he affected to depreciate half the rest of the peerage, speaking most contemptuously of the various works treating of that order.

"These books," he observed, "are constructed on a very faulty principle. When the pedigree of a newly-titled merchant or lawyer is given almost at as much length as that of the most

ancient baron of the realm, it is hard for ignorant and unreflecting people to apprehend the vast difference really existing between the two."

"Very truly said, Mr. Selby," complacently observed his Lordship: "a most serious defect it is."

Encouraged by this mark of approval, the speaker proceeded with renewed spirit, addressing himself, by look, chiefly to the noble guest.

"The negligence, also, with which these publications are got up is lamentable. In the course of the last twelve months no less than four have been sent for his Lordship's revisal, and it is surprising what lists of errors and omissions in every one of them I drew up, having the honour of his superintendence: false dates, names misspelt, pedigree confused. It is positively an injury to nobility that persons so miserably unqualified should set about a task which requires so much diligence and research."

"Very true, Mr. Selby; very true!" again echoed the Marquis. "I assure you, Lady Margaret, my worthy friend has not at all overstated the case. It was really extraordinary,

quite extraordinary! Upon my word, I was astonished at the assurance of those ill-informed compilers."

Lady Margaret had not deigned to regard the indirect flattery of the parasite, but she could not pass wholly unnoticed the piteous complaint of the Marquis.

"There are, no doubt," said she, "many errors in the most carefully corrected of these works; it must be unavoidable; but, I think, their more serious deficiency is that they can, at the best, give little more than a dry catalogue, conveying hardly any thing of what is really important in family history."

Lord Donnington received this reply with a very vacant expression of countenance; but a word or two which Mr. Selby addressed to him, in an under-tone, called forth his most approving smile.

"By all means—a very good time indeed."

Mr. Selby immediately disappeared, and during his absence the Marquis himself unfolded the object of his mission.

"I have just sent, Lady Margaret, for a volume

which I am proud to submit to your inspection. I have at length, not, as you may suppose, without prodigious labour, collected, and digested, and arranged the fullest particulars of our own family history. I have had only a few copies struck off: a few only of my most intimate friends will be admitted to its possession. Sir Aubrey, of course, will be the first of all; but, in the mean time, I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of showing and explaining it to your Ladyship."

As he spoke the envoy returned, accompanied by a footman, carrying a large volume with little less reverence than is due to sacred writ. The eyes of the aged nobleman actually glistened with pleasure when, the case of crimson velvet having been withdrawn, the "Memorials of the House of Vere" was opened at the richly-emblazoned title-page. With especial care he pointed out to Lady Margaret's notice two plans, the one comprising the whole of his extensive possessions, the other showing what portion would be severed at his decease and become the inheritance of his granddaughter. So absorbed was he by his one

long-cherished project, that he actually forgot, for the moment, the sad bereavement which had occasioned him to meditate it. The sudden and violent agitation of his unhappy wife alone brought it to his recollection. Indignant with a husband who really seemed to regard territorial inheritance more fondly than the memory of their lost child, the Marchioness rose hastily, pushing aside the ponderous tome with an energy which had nearly caused it to lose its equilibrium. Checking one or two convulsive sobs by a violent effort of self-command, she proceeded, followed by Catherine, to establish herself at the farthest part of the adjoining room. The Marquis, as soon as some idea of the nature of her feelings dawned on his mind, hastened to endeavour to soothe her. Mr. Selby, with better tact than he had yet exhibited, quitted the room, leaving the ladies to continue their researches, if they pleased, without his assistance. But Lady Margaret immediately turned from the book, grieved that what was meant to gratify herself should have inflicted so keen a pang on another maternal heart.

"Lady Donnington seems fortunate," she ob-

served, "in the companionship of that lady: her countenance is remarkably prepossessing."

"Do you think so?" answered Lady Arabella, with cold disdain: "I cannot say I see it; but, I confess, I have not studied her physiognomy with much attention."

"It is really worthy of remark: there is in it so happy a union of sense and feeling."

Lady Arabella's expression was now one of marked surprise.

"She may be a very admirable person, I dare say," she replied: "all that I actually know about her is—that she is Lady Donnington's companion!"

"She is the more entitled to respect," answered Lady Margaret, "if she honourably holds a very difficult position. It has too often a disadvantageous effect on the character. But society has no right to exclaim against defects of its own creation. A servile degree of deference is exacted, and then they are despised who have been compelled to render it."

"That will never be Miss Mansfield's case," eagerly exclaimed Lady Emma. "Attentive and

obliging she will be, for that is her nature with all; but to nothing of mean compliance would she descend, I am certain."

"Has she been long resident with you?" asked Lady Margaret, much interested by the warmth of this vindication.

"Two days, I believe," derisively interposed the aunt.

"But she lived here three years when I was a child," replied the niece; "so that I do assure you I know her well enough to justify all I have said in her behalf: I could, indeed, add much more."

"On the recollection of eight years old?" inquired Lady Arabella, with a still more bitter sneer.

But Lady Margaret's heart was won by the youthful advocate. She yet more earnestly regretted that her son's eyes did not rest upon that glowing countenance, nor hear those tones, trembling between timidity and affectionate earnestness to convince.

Lord Donnington now rejoined them, having made peace with his not unjustly offended spouse;

but the check he had received had considerably damped his spirits: the unnatural exhilaration was gone. The topics now discussed were not of a nature to merit narration. Lady Margaret departed early. Up to the latest moment Lord Donnington had contrived to flatter himself that Sir Aubrey would appear; and he charged her with a profusion of regrets that public duty should have interfered with this "happy family meeting."

"I wonder," said Lady Emma, with the mantling colour which betrays some deep but secret interest in the subject of discourse—"I wonder why it is that gentlemen are so eager to get into Parliament. What a grievous bondage they must find it to be!"

"My dear," said the Marquis, with peculiar stateliness, "I regret exceedingly to hear you talk so ignorantly: a man in Sir Aubrey's position must be in Parliament."

Mr. Selby, who was again one of the company, thought this an inviting occasion for a farewell compliment.

"It is undoubtedly," he observed, "one of the chief advantages of our admirable Constitution

that it affords those who are to be the ornaments of the Upper House an easy opportunity of previously displaying their talents in the Lower."

His words were hardly ended before the speaker became afraid that they might do him serious prejudice. In looking to a future patron he had forgotten him on whom he depended at the present time. Sir Aubrey could not become an "ornament" to the House of Peers till the Marquis himself had bidden adieu to earthly grandeur. He coloured to the very ears, and cast a timorous glance around. But no notice appeared to have been taken of the remark. His parting tribute to maternal pride had met with no better success than those which had preceded it; but, on the other hand, the Marquis did not seem to have heeded his maladdress. Upon the whole, he could not delude himself with the hope of having made much progress towards his object this time, but future opportunities might occur; for his Lordship, though wholly unsupported by his wife, persisted in urging on Lady Margaret *their* earnest desire for frequent intercourse with herself and her son.

When alone with Catherine, Lady Emma, after slightly lamenting that she had not foreseen at how early an hour she should be free, spoke warmly of her newly introduced relative.

"I had taken quite an erroneous impression of her. She is not at all the formidable personage I had pictured her; and she pleased me, above all, by seeing at once what *you* were."

"The colouring of your own partiality, probably," answered Catherine. "But I cannot be mistaken in her cordial disposition towards you. I hope you will derive much benefit from intimacy with her."

"Intimacy!" repeated Lady Emma, gravely: "no, it can never amount to that."

"Why so? you acknowledge that you no longer dread her."

"Very little now; but she does not know me: I should not please her. I can depend only on *you*."

She threw her arms round Catherine's neck as she spoke, as in the days of frank childish communication. The latter, remembering the occurrences of the morning, waited in anxious

silence. But no words followed, only a half-suppressed sigh; and in another instant Lady Emma had disappeared, averting a face which might in itself betray too much.

CHAPTER V.

TWO days afterwards there was unusual excitement in the Donnington household: Lady Emma was to make her first appearance in the presence of Majesty. She was an object of general regard, and no event of a cheerful kind had occurred within those walls for many years. The waiting-women both of the Marchioness and her step-daughter were eager to assist the triumphant Barnes with their skill; nor was Catherine an unconcerned spectator of their labour. With glad fondness did she gaze when all was at length accomplished; when the high, snowy plumes were finally adjusted on the head which bore them so gracefully. Bright with the modest consciousness of pleasing, Lady

Emma departed, to return, about three hours after, exactly in the same frame of mind, contentedly aware that, though she had attracted approving notice, not a few in the throng had far eclipsed her pretensions. She was glad to find Catherine disengaged, at liberty to listen to all particulars of an occasion interesting from its entire novelty—the long detention on the crowded staircase; the difficulty experienced in penetrating to the circle; in fine, a variety of little circumstances not altogether agreeable to those accustomed to those courtly receptions, but amusing enough on a first introduction.

"But, after all," she said at length, "I am forgetting the most important part of my story. I am charged with a message to you from a friend——"

"Mrs. Falconbridge!" exclaimed Catherine, with the animation of sudden hope.

"No; I am sorry to disappoint you——"

"I was wild to think of it: you do not even know her by sight."

"I have some recollection of her face: I remember it was beautiful; but I could not have been sure. Nevertheless a friend it was."

"You are jesting! No one else could so much as know my name."

"Indeed you are mistaken. I am surprised—will you excuse my saying so?—that you are not quicker in apprehension. Look back to my childhood again."

"You cannot mean Lady Coningsby?"

"I do: it was that very person. She is regular in Court attendance, and certainly contributes to its lustre. Her beauty is little impaired, and her taste in dress is admirable. The Duchess will not endure to hear it said, but the fact is not the less certain. We happened, just at the head of the staircase, to be wedged close together, and, amidst the tumult around, had our conference as much to ourselves as if in this room. *Entre nous*, though, it was well for me that the Duchess was too tightly pinioned to look behind her!"

"There is still, then, some family dissension?"

"Call it rather an interminable and deadly feud. That marriage was a singular affair! No doubt it was a deliberate scheme on the part of the Lisles. The Duchess, Lady Donnington, my uncle himself, are all fully sensible of having been duped,

and that conviction much envenoms their resentment. The union has proved, unhappily, little worth the deceptions practised on his side as well as hers. You know, when we were at Beaulieu, how little he cared about me, and yet—would you believe it?—it was to my interesting little self that he ascribed his frequent visits here, and constant meetings in our walks. I was so like Mamma, his dear, favourite sister! And yet after all, I suspect, he hardly meant to go so far as he did; and there were also signs of doubt and hesitation on her part. She would sigh, and play plaintive airs on the harp whole hours together, sadly neglecting my lessons. And not seldom I saw her burn the little notes conveyed among the bon-bons and bouquets sent for me, with marks of the most lively indignation. For my own part, child as I was, I could not help wondering what it all meant; but having none to whom I could speak freely, I held my peace altogether. It is strange that the correspondence could have been carried on so long without suspicion; but, as I have since heard, Lady Donnington was just becoming wary when the whole affair came to light. My governess left

me abruptly of her own accord, and in two days became my aunt! I can give you no idea of the ferment it excited: the Duchess especially was so passionately distressed, so vehemently indignant!"

"And after all, you say, they are an unhappy couple?"

"They are indeed. Not that they have come to any public rupture: they inhabit the same house, but they avoid as much as possible being together."

"Are their children no bond of union?"

"No; rather the contrary, being unluckily all girls. An heir might, perhaps, have counted for something; but he has been expected in vain. Poor little things! the birth of each cost my uncle a regular fit of sullenness: at the last, I am told, he absolutely stormed."

"Is she a tender mother?"

"She claims the character, yet I can hardly give it her. These unlucky little creatures, while they disappoint the pride of one parent, rather mortify the vanity of the other. A mother cannot look so very youthful with so many babes around her. Yet she has had fits of fondness. Two or three

seasons ago her portrait was taken with several clinging around her, and a very charming group they certainly composed. But the mood did not last long. It was found that sitting up to be exhibited to her company did not at all agree with them, and that walks with their nurses were far better than drives in her carriage; so the whole system was given up. Since then new habits have been adopted. She is now distinguished as a patroness of literature; her society is chiefly composed of authors, and she has herself published a volume of poems—I must confess I have never been able to read them, but that may be owing only to my want of taste."

"How is it," asked Catherine, "since she is on these uncomfortable terms with your relations, that you have any knowledge of her?"

"Why, my uncle's pride was concerned in maintaining her right to be received among us; so, to avoid coming to actual hostility with him, it was settled that, although the elder members of the family could not, I might pay her occasional morning visits. This gives me occasion to see a good many of the *literati*, foreigners especially.

I find it rather amusing sometimes. But I really think my visits are not without benefit to Lady Coningsby. For my own sake, I always remind her that she is not only a beauty and a *bel esprit*, but a mother also. I love children dearly, especially when they are pretty and engaging, like my little cousins. I long to show them to you; so prepare to be conveyed there very soon."

"I cannot think she would like to see me: when we were at Beaulieu she declined my acquaintance. I am surprised you remember our having spoken to each other: it was but once, in your presence at least."

"Very true; but I never forgot that one occasion, and therefore, on seeing her to-day, immediately demanded her congratulations on having met you again."

"Oh, that explains the mystery! She could hardly, then, do less than own having some knowledge of me; but there it ends."

"It does not indeed. I know her well enough to be sure that she was sincere in immediately expressing her wish to see you. She desired

me to bring you next time I came, and so I shall."

Catherine was still reluctant; but Lady Emma persisted, and would not delay the call beyond the next day. The Viscountess certainly did receive Catherine with great appearance of regard, and with no air of assumption, greatly altered as her position had been since their last parting. Her manner was unchanged: she still spoke in silvery accents, and with a certain air of languid melancholy. In touching on the rapid flight of time she looked not altogether unconscious that his pinions had brushed away but few of her charms: her figure, indeed, had acquired something of *embonpoint*, but not enough to diminish its grace: and if her cheek did owe a shade of its bloom to the cosmetic art, the touch had been most judiciously delicate. Music and poetry appeared to be the occupations of the hour. A harp, always her favourite instrument, stood near, and a table beside her was covered with manuscript verses. Two young ladies sitting with her were much perplexed as to who the stranger might be. "A poor relation" was the first conjec-

ture; but no, she looked too easy for that position.

"An authoress, perhaps," suggested the one sister.

"No," again answered the other, whose first poetical efforts her Ladyship was now condescending to direct—"no; there is no *mind* there. Lady Coningsby would not encourage insignificant pretenders."

In the mean time Lady Emma was preferring her usual request for her little cousins.

"The children?" replied the mother. "Really I don't know where they are: at dinner, I suppose, or out for their walk."

"Pardon me, my dear Aunt; I have not so far lost sight of childhood as not to remember the usual arrangements. They must have dined at least an hour ago; and as to being out on a day like this—cold, bleak, and winter-like as it is—I am in great hopes their nurses have thought it better to keep them at home. Let us see them, little darlings! if they are within call."

"Impossible!" answered Lady Coningsby, warmly. "I really cannot have them all let loose

upon me: my nerves this morning are quite unequal to it; and, besides, I entirely disapprove the practice. Bring down a whole tribe of children, and all rational enjoyment is destroyed; nothing is heard but the forced compliments the silly parents are supposed to expect."

"There is little danger of that with us," said Lady Emma, smiling as she looked at Catherine: "we are true children-lovers, I know. But since you object to their numbers, let them come in detachments, two or three at a time, and I will engage to keep them as much apart as you can desire, should any one else come in. We are such good friends as to require no other companionship."

Upon this assurance Lady Coningsby sent for her two elder daughters, who came in eagerly, delighted to see their young, lively, and kind cousin. But hardly had the latter introduced them to Catherine when sounds were heard announcing other visitors, and, mindful of her promise to their lady-mother, she withdrew with them into an inner apartment. The door was not closed, but the whole party were so completely

out of sight that the new comers were not at all aware of their vicinity. One of these, a man in middle life, by his foreign aspect and title immediately secured a certain degree of favour with the two sisters. But the other awakened a far livelier interest in Catherine Mansfield. She could not hear him announced as Lord Henry Beauchamp without a secret start. His appearance was most prepossessing: he had that peculiar grace, highly essential to the handsome of the female sex, but absolutely indispensable in the other—a seeming unconsciousness of the advantage. Know it no doubt he did, but there was no challenge of admiration in his aspect, and his dress was of that most correct description which has nothing noticeable, being merely what is usually worn at the period. At his first entrance Catherine observed him look rapidly round, with an expression of disappointment, but it was unnoticed by any other. In presenting his companion, the Baron d'Herbigny, to the Viscountess he assumed a kind of mock-heroic air.

"Motives of humanity have induced me to conduct my friend to your Ladyship. He is a

victim to the tedium of existence. Where but in these charmed walls can he find a sure asylum from his fiend?"

The Viscountess, smiling most graciously, was about to address the afflicted stranger in his own language, but he was in haste to prove himself not unskilled in hers. He spoke with a strong French accent, and his phraseology was so curiously compounded between the two tongues as to render it difficult for his auditors to maintain the gravity his lamentations seemed to demand.

Ah, Madame, have pity! If you have need of *un homme d'affaires*—comment m'exprimer? —un laquais même, attach me for always à votre service!"

Lady Coningsby, answering the supplication in the spirit in which it was made, regretted being unable to afford the desired sanctuary; but would not the wide metropolis itself answer the desired purpose?

The Baron shook his head despondingly.

"*Mais non;* this London, *sans doute,* is *grande cité, mais enfin*—it is all the same. I have *travel* very much. I have seen *toutes les merveilles de*

l'Europe—not *one*, but two times; *et vraiment* I have found nothing *of new*. You do all the days what you do before. The sun rise, and you mount into your carriage, and you come to your town. You see all—the churches, the pictures—and you dine, and you sleep—*et voilà tout!* That is what it is to *travel!*" laying a strong emphasis on the final word, and uplifting both hands so as to display the palms.

The patient having concluded this fuller statement of his case, the fair physician felt somewhat at a loss what other remedy to suggest—ambition, perhaps, the most powerful of all stimulants? But not even this did the Baron accept as a specific against his inveterate disorder.

"I do know very well what that is," said he: "you write, you speak, you make yourself *grand nom*, et vous voilà ministre d'état. Mais, hélas! à quoi bon cela? You propose des mesures which are not *approve;* et alors il faut rendre your portefeuille, and retire yourself to your *campagne*."

"Well then, Baron," interposed Lord Henry, "since, it seems, pleasure with you tends only to pain, why not see if pain may not yield something

like pleasure? Try anxiety, anger; be cheated, be plundered!"

"*Ma foi*, my dear friend, I have *prove* that too. It happen to me when I am last at Rome to be rob *d'une assez grande somme d'argent*. I make complain to the *autorités*. *Eh bien! ces gens-là* make me *cent-mille promesses;* but they do nothing. *Les vilains se sauvent; alors*, I am very much in anger, *véritablement je m'enrage; mais enfin, cela passe*, in three days I am *plus* ennuyé than never!"

At this dolorous climax a merry laugh gave tokens of the unseen auditors. Though the Baron's griefs were wholly unintelligible to the two little girls, the broken language in which they were detailed was irresistibly diverting. The Viscountess, highly indignant, inflicted on the delinquents the due punishment of a remand to the nursery. But Lord Henry profited by their disgrace to enter the other room as on an impulse of compassion, and thus detain Lady Emma. In haste to dispel whatever erroneous impression she might have received from his adulatory address to the Viscountess, "Those charming little girls have

much obliged me," he said, as they retreated: "but for their very excusable mirth, I might have missed altogether the object of my call."

The insinuated explanation did not seem at once to remove a little disposition to feminine pique, for she answered, "The motive you assigned was that of introducing your friend."

"To *others* I could give but that," he replied, with quite as strong an accent of fond reproach as their actual position could authorize; "but were there not happy signals at the door?"

The blush which rose as he spoke was her only answer. But though there was no longer the lightest shade of displeasure, he discerned an expression of anxiety. Her mind, in fact, ever since she knew him to be near, had been intently occupied by a wish to obtain from his own lips a fuller statement of the story related to her by Miss Dallas—one which might, in part at least, efface the discredit it reflected on him. She endeavoured to give her inquiries the guise of mere curiosity, but he fully penetrated the deeper feeling by which they were prompted. He could with difficulty—while listening to the incomplete sentences which

would hardly have conveyed her meaning to indifferent ears—restrain a smile which would rather too plainly have manifested how perfectly he understood her. With eager gratitude he gave her his own version of the matter, lamenting his brother's severe sense of public justice, and speaking of his domestic's criminality with as much wonder as concern.

"He was as trustworthy a servant, when he came to me, as could be desired. I shall hardly find another in whom I can place so much confidence. How he could possibly commit so deliberate a fraud I cannot imagine."

Thus marvelled the young nobleman, putting quite out of the question how far his own habits of honourable play might have contributed to the culprit's demoralization. It was an idea which would never have spontaneously arisen in his mind, and which, when suggested by his brother, he had indignantly spurned. His gentle auditor grieved with him, accepting his compassionate regrets as his full vindication from blame. Her eyes, downcast while he spoke, met his, when he concluded, with an expression

of deep joy, as of one from whose inmost heart a weight had been removed. More than ever enthralled, he sought to find some trivial pretext for prolonging so delightful an interview; but in vain: she feared that even the few minutes spent in obtaining the desired explanation might have occasioned suspicion.

They found Lady Coningsby declaiming on the justice of the Baron's complaints: it was a favourable opportunity for displaying her own powers.

"True, indeed, it is," said she: "there is no real variety in human existence. Monarch or mechanic, what is it to all, but one unceasing round of dull repose or harassing toil?"

Her auditors were variously affected by the harangue. Two among them, just then, found life an exquisite enjoyment. The poetical aspirant sighed in cadence with her Ladyship; but the younger sister professed herself very well satisfied with things as they were.

"Whenever I see a hearse," said she, "I feel so glad I am not in it."

This flippant remark put an effectual termina-

tion to all solemnity of discourse; and Lady Emma soon took leave. On her way home she talked much of her cousins, and laughed a little at the absurdities of the Baron. There was but one person they had seen to whom she made no allusion, not considering him, it seemed, remarkable enough for notice.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Duchess of Ilminster did not, like Lady Arabella Vere, affect altogether to have forgotten one so insignificant as Catherine Mansfield. Her Grace condescended to acknowledge a distinct recollection that such a person had once the charge of Lady Emma's education; but, at the same time, her demeanour, though not absolutely uncourteous, plainly evinced that she also bore in memory their strong differences of opinion. She was, upon the whole, not dissatisfied with her niece as she was. The latter had never imbibed the spirit of her instructions; but as it somehow happened that she was pleasing in the eyes of the other sex, her Grace was disposed to be indulgent. Provided woman's grand

object were secured, the means employed did not greatly signify. She derived also much personal gratification from her office of chaperon. All who acknowledged a recollection extending but ten years back were unanimous in maintaining that Lady Emma, in these her brightest days, could sustain no comparison with the transcendent lustre of her aunt's beauty at that period; and some would adroitly insinuate that even now her majestic graces completely eclipsed those of the youthful sylph beside her.

The grand affair of Court presentation concluded, the *fête* by which it was to be commemorated became the subject of serious thought. It was the Duchess's ambition that it should be distinguished above every other in the season —a point not very easy of attainment. Lady Emma herself was unable to feel the importance of the object. Whether the entertainment were given in her own honour or that of another was to her a matter of little moment, so that it did but include the one individual she desired to meet. But, well aware that her woman Barnes felt very differently, she kindly arranged that

he latter should attend her at Ilminster House, ınd there complete her toilet. Just when she was about to depart a note from Miss Dallas was brought to her.

It was brief, but she seemed to find much difficulty in apprehending its purport. After reading it twice over, she exclaimed to Catherine, "What can she mean? Here is a warning as mysterious as that which gave intimation of the Gunpowder Plot! She bids me beware of a danger which she does not point out, and which I could not guard against if she did. There is something, she says, in some evening paper which may cause a terrible commotion here, and she earnestly exhorts me to keep it out of the hands of my 'noble grandsire,' as she calls him. This is really quite ridiculous! she knows I cannot interfere with any of Lord Donnington's arrangements. And why need I? What can there be in any newspaper to do me harm?"

But she added, a moment after, with some appearance of anxiety, "I wish I knew what it is, though. Can you see these papers?"

"I do not think I can: they are never brought to the Marchioness."

"After all," Lady Emma resumed, "perhaps it is only one of Elizabeth's provoking tricks. I should not much wonder if she should have invented the whole story on purpose to perplex and alarm me. If so I will foil her, for I will think no more of it!"

With these words she tore up the note, and departed for Ilminster House. The great occasion was duly honoured. Throngs of distinguished guests acknowledged her Grace's unequalled skill in ministering to their entertainment, and her fair niece received a large tribute of adulation. Lord Henry alone forebore to come prominently forward. Proudly conscious that the favour for which so many were contending beamed only on him, he was far from desiring a public triumph. The more deeply he loved her, the more apprehensive he became lest her family, too soon aroused to suspicion, should prohibit their future intercourse. By some observers his unusually cautious behaviour was attributed to the newspaper paragraph so mysteriously alluded to by Miss Dallas

They were mistaken: the parties chiefly concerned were not, as yet, aware of its having appeared. The shock had been sustained solely by the Marquis of Donnington, on whom it had indeed produced a tremendous effect. The inserter had had rather a deeper motive than that of amusing the public with a little piece of fashionable gossip. Detained almost constantly beside his noble patron, Mr. Selby contrived, nevertheless, to procure whatever information might be necessary to the furtherance of his own schemes. He thus early became aware of Lord Henry's assiduities, and, lightly as they were in general regarded, they excited in him the most serious anxiety, as threatening destruction to his hopes in regard to Sir Aubrey. How should he proceed? To give the alarm to the Marquis might not improbably, in the first instance, draw down the latter's wrath on himself, the officious informant. Anonymously only could such a hint be safely imparted. Accordingly he drew up a paragraph whose heading, "Approaching *Fête* at Ilminster House," would infallibly attract his Lordship's attention, and in the latter part of which allusion

was made to a prevalent report that the "lovely heiress" would shortly be united to "the only brother of a noble Duke." To make the grandfather aware of the granddaughter's *penchant* was but one step gained in the way of overcoming it, and substituting another in her favour; and were these material points secured, even then Mr. Selby's promotion was but a remote contingency: but a professed schemer can look far into the distance.

About the time when Lady Emma quitted the house the plot began to work. The Marquis unfolded the paper containing the intimation, and soon a quivering motion of the sheets betrayed that it had been perused. But who was he to whom the honour of being about to receive her hand was thus presumptuously ascribed? Happily for him, in this first shock of amazement, there were not many persons to whom the indications given could refer. Only three Dukes had only brothers. He reviewed them in his mind: Lord Charles St. Leger married already; Lord John Pierpoint, nearly sixty years of age; the Duke of Delaval's

brother, it must be he—yes, that notorious prodigal Lord Henry Beauchamp! What a conclusion was this! Not only would the estates he so anxiously desired to preserve to the house of Vere be for ever divided therefrom, they would probably be grievously impaired to supply a husband's profusion! As soon as he could collect his senses he summoned the Marchioness to afford him counsel. But she in no degree allayed his disquietude. She was herself more than usually irritated against Lady Emma: this night of high festivity brought her delinquencies more prominently into view. Taking the paper at his Lordship's desire, she read the paragraph, and returned it with no other notice than a "Likely enough, so far as I can judge."

"Likely enough!" he repeated, in a tone which evinced how ill he could endure any thing like indifference in such a question. She saw herself obliged, in conjugal pity and prudence, to show some deeper interest, and hastened to explain herself further. Lady Emma's marriage was an affair in regard to which she was resolved in no way to interfere. What she knew of her mind,

she much regretted to say, gave her little reason to discredit the statement. There *might* be such a preference, reprehensible as it would be. But there was one in the house who was not unlikely to know more on the subject: she would send Miss Mansfield to him.

Accordingly she abruptly told Catherine, "Lord Donnington wishes to speak to you immediately. I am ill, and quite unable to satisfy him on the point on which he is anxious: you may perhaps know more on the subject."

Catherine was alarmed, at once surmising that Miss Dallas's enigmatical epistle, however maliciously intended, did indeed threaten a real danger to Lady Emma's tranquillity. What could she answer on such a question? No confidence had been reposed in her: must she betray conclusions formed only on what she had involuntarily seen and heard? In this painfully perplexed state of mind she obeyed the unwelcome summons. The aged nobleman, by the time she appeared, had mastered himself so far as to be able to conduct his investigation with his usual studied dignity.

"I have thought it advisable, Miss Mansfield, to send for you to assist my inquiries into a subject of great delicacy. A very disagreeable, a very extraordinary rumour has come under my notice, in which, I lament to say, my granddaughter, Lady Emma, has the misfortune to be involved, and Lady Donnington has referred me to you as one not unlikely to know something on the subject. Read this paragraph deliberately."

Catherine read accordingly, and was in her own mind compelled to acknowledge that the report was not wholly unfounded. But, fortunately for her, the Marquis was more disposed to communicate his own conclusions than to search narrowly into hers.

"In the first place," said he, "you cannot but recognize in this most unwarrantable paragraph a distinct allusion to Lady Emma."

His pause of inquiry compelled Catherine to reply, "Certainly, my Lord; that cannot be doubted."

"Most abominable licence of the press," said his Lordship, considerably excited: "the most interesting affairs of young ladies of the highest

rank made familiar in the mouths of the lowest of the people!"

He paused, half suffocated by indignant pride, but after a while resumed, in his usual manner, "In regard to the other distinguished name brought forward with this shameful freedom, I cannot come to any other conclusion than that it is that of Lord Henry Beauchamp, brother of the Duke of Delaval."

Here he looked stedfastly on Catherine; but as she commanded her countenance sufficiently to betray nothing, he proceeded, "In most cases I would not condescend to notice anonymous information; but there are exceptions—there are exceptions to every rule; and when the names of young ladies of high station are thus compromised, it becomes the duty, the indispensable duty of those on whose protection they depend to search diligently into the matter: I ask you, therefore, whether your conversations with Lady Emma lead you to suppose there can be any possible foundation for this report."

Catherine had trembled with apprehension when this speech began, but its conclusion enabled her

to elude direct reply. She answered, simply, "Lady Emma, my Lord, has never spoken to me on the subject."

This was all she could say, and she dared not hope it would satisfy the Marquis. But it did. Being extremely reluctant to credit the report, he was disposed to think her testimony had gone further than it actually did on the opposite side. He answered, under that persuasion, "I am happy to receive your statement, Miss Mansfield. This silence on Lady Emma's part confirms my previous conviction that the whole story is an audacious fabrication, to which I shall immediately give a peremptory contradiction. Nevertheless, since it has been circulated, I desire you to intimate to Lady Emma that such an alliance must never be in her contemplation: it would incur my decided disapprobation."

His gaunt and drooping frame was for a moment erected in guardian dignity, as he authoritatively delivered this injunction.

"It may, perhaps, at first sight seem strange," he continued, "that I should so strongly disapprove Lady Emma's matching into the house of Delaval.

There are, however, certain serious objections. His Grace is fortunate in possessing a very numerous offspring; his brother, therefore, is not likely ever to be on equal terms with my granddaughter. But there is another consideration of still greater magnitude: I have in view an union which would be most highly desirable. I do not desire at present to be more explicit; but as Lady Emma may not be at all aware of this circumstance, I judge it best, Miss Mansfield, that you should communicate a hint of that nature—delicately and discreetly, you will understand."

Much fatigued by the delivery of this harangue, his Lordship signified its conclusion by an action of the head, and Catherine gladly withdrew. She had seen in this interview a striking instance of the tenacity of human passions. Lord Donnington, himself now trembling on the verge of the grave, had twice stood beside the death-bed of a son, the heir of his house; yet how unrelaxingly did he cling to the relics of a pride so grievously humbled!

But she could not dwell much at the moment

on reflections like these. A difficult and unwelcome task was before her. It was a relief to find that she might give her thoughts entirely to the subject, Lady Donnington having retired to her room earlier than usual. She was uneasy on her own account. Upon rigid self-examination she believed that she could not, in justice to Lady Emma, have been otherwise than carefully reserved; yet it was painful to the integrity of her mind to have confirmed an erroneous persuasion. Restless in spirit, she walked up and down the room, half intending to await Lady Emma's return. But as hour after hour went on, and still the revels at Ilminster House were prolonged, she came to a wiser resolve.

The communication she had to make must be of an agitating character for both parties. Some previous rest would be very desirable. Her own slumbers, however, were broken and unquiet: again and again she dreamed that she had told all, heard all, and was relieved so far of the weight resting upon her mind, and then awoke to find it still to be done.

Morning came at last; and at the earliest hour

at which one who had gone to rest so late could be expected to rise, Catherine repaired to Lady Emma's dressing-room. The waiting-maid was descanting eagerly on the last night's festivity, and her young mistress listening good-naturedly to her remarks, and answering her questions; but Catherine could plainly read, in eyes whose greatest beauty was that of giving back the thoughts which held possession of the mind, that she was very anxious. Accordingly, dismissing attendance as soon as possible, Lady Emma spared Catherine the difficulty of beginning the discourse.

"This unparalleled ball," said she, "has made Barnes unusually slow this morning, and I was impatient to speak of something of more consequence. I am very uneasy about that paragraph Elizabeth mentioned last night. Only think how indiscreet she can sometimes be, or rather how mischievous! Immediately on seeing me she inquired how I had 'managed about it,' in so loud a whisper that I am much afraid several persons heard her. You do not know what it was, I suppose?"

"Yes, I do: Lord Donnington showed it to me. I wrote it down from memory. Here it is."

Lady Emma's hand received the writing with trembling haste. Her rapid change of hue, from the deepest flush of consciousness to the deadly pallor of alarm, would alone have confirmed Catherine's suspicions. Her first exclamation was, like that of a frightened child, "Oh, what shall I do?"

Catherine looked at her with affectionate sympathy.

"My grandfather gave you this! What *did* he say?"

"He was much disturbed—much displeased."

"Oh, I know he must be! I am very sorry. Who can have invented it? It is not true."

"Not true, inasmuch as there is no engagement; but, my dear Emma, I must ask, since it has come to this, is there nothing like affection?"

No reply.

"And it has been hitherto altogether unknown to your family?"

"Oh, no; not to all! My aunt the Duchess knows: it was at Beaulieu, last summer, that we first met."

"She knows, and sanctions it without Lord Donnington's approbation?"

"She has never spoken to me on the subject; but she must see—that is, what there is, which is —which is only—in short, he has never said any thing more than something I seem to understand. But how shall I bear to meet him now?" she added, with an expression of the deepest confusion, twisting the piece of written paper nervously in her fingers. "And they are all talking of it, every body! Oh, Miss Mansfield, what shall I do? What can I have done? I must have been very wrong!"

"Not in the least, in *that* way, I am sure," said Catherine, fondly embracing her: "it is only that you live in a world that has many thousand eyes, and some of them very watchful and inquisitive."

"I did mean to have told it all to *you* the very first night; but I could not: you had never seen him!"

"I have now, and do not at all wonder to find how it is."

There was a close, a grateful embrace in answer,

with the low-murmured words, "How kindly you speak! how differently from Elizabeth!"

"I hope, indeed, I am rather less unfitted to receive confidence."

"Confidence!" exclaimed Lady Emma, raising her head with a start of surprise. "Do you think I could have told her? Oh, no; never! but she detected it almost before I knew it myself; and she does so torment me! But do not believe all she says of him: her representations are cruelly exaggerated."

"I can very easily believe it."

"I do not deny that he has faults—far from it," she added, with a sigh; "but there is much excuse. He was so young when his parents died, and his means are so unequal to his station. It is indeed a painful position. I do really believe the liberality of his disposition is the one chief cause of his embarrassments."

"Liberality without justice, my dear Emma!"

The apology was checked: Lady Emma felt the truth of what was implied; but in a few instants she resumed, "He has indeed much feeling: if you had heard how very kindly he

spoke of that poor man, his servant, I am sure you would have owned that I am not mistaken in this. And then, above all, he is so different from men in general in one respect. You know I am an heiress, and I am quite sure that is what alone draws so much attention to me."

She looked, as she spoke, so attractingly lovely that Catherine could not but think she did mankind some injustice in this last conclusion.

"Their views are so palpable," she continued: "they court me for the sake of what I am to have; and it makes me feel the more the difference in *his* manner. I do, with all my heart, believe he would have been the same if my uncle were still living."

Catherine could not but inwardly own that there were grounds for this reliance. She remembered to have seen in Lord Henry indications of real and lively passion—a look of almost irrepressible disappointment at not seeing her whom he sought, another of eager joy when it proved that she was actually near. A natural impulse urged her to say what would be heard with delight; but before she could decide whether

to indulge or repress it, Lady Emma spoke again: "And how will it be now? Will Lord Donnington prohibit our seeing or speaking to each other? it is hardly possible, living as we both do."

"The Marquis," Catherine replied, "is disposed to discredit the report. He questioned me as to what I knew of it. It was a very distressing inquiry to me, surmising what I did. But as I said nothing in corroboration of the story, he became the more persuaded of its untruth, and intends to publish a contradiction."

"How very painful!" said Lady Emma. "Must my name be again brought forward?"

"But Lord Donnington charged me," continued Catherine, "to assure you that such a match would be entirely contrary to his will."

"I knew it would be. It is no more than I expected; no more than is right, perhaps. But if *he* should alter his conduct altogether, might not Lord Donnington, in time, withdraw his objections?"

Catherine hesitated to reply.

"Lord Donnington, to me, at least," she said, "spoke only of an objection which would not be thus removed—the inequality of fortune."

"But *you*," said Lady Emma, "you surely do not think that a valid ground for rejecting any suitor?"

"It signifies not what I think, dear Emma: it is not on mine, but Lord Donnington's judgment that your fate depends."

"If I could but look forward to a hope of his amendment," said Lady Emma, fervently, "I could bear any thing! Indeed they do not know him: he is already better than many would think. Sometimes, when he is talking to me and no one else is near, I can see this so clearly. And his brother the Duke of Delaval is really an excellent man. Elizabeth would have led you to believe them at variance, but it is not so. There may be occasional differences; but, on the whole, I know they are sincerely attached. May not his example have a happy influence?"

"Has it as yet?" Catherine replied. "Do not think me a harsh judge if I cannot look so hopefully on the case as you would wish. Such reformations are not unprecedented, but they are rare. I do not think a brother who has been hitherto unheeded very likely to effect much now.

What degree of hope I have rests chiefly on another—on yourself."

"On me!" said Lady Emma. "Alas! what advice can I give? I want wisdom for myself."

"You have what he wants—sound principle. For man and woman that is the root of all. Now hear me. You said just now that when alone with you the good of his character comes into sight more than at other times. I have no doubt it does: it is you who unconsciously draw it out. Use those moments well—they are very precious—use them for his sake."

The tenderness of her counsel quite overcame Lady Emma.

"Dear, kind friend that you are!" said she: "you do not, then, tell me that I must never think of him?"

"No; for I well know it would be vain: he has already said enough to render such counsel ineffectual. I deeply regret that he has made this impression, but I cannot efface it. But you will, I know, respect Lord Donnington's parental rights. Without his consent no engagement can take place. What hope I held out referred

only to the beneficial influence you might exercise."

"It would be the dearest of all hopes, could I but cherish it!" answered Lady Emma.

Catherine could not meet Lady Donnington that morning without considerable apprehension: should she question, it might be impossible to avoid disclosure. But her Ladyship made no reference to the subject of the paragraph: she had already heard from her lord that he found Miss Mansfield knew nothing about it, and that he was quite satisfied of its being utterly unfounded. Nevertheless Catherine felt that it had revived much of the jealous distrust which had formerly banished her from Lady Emma, and that the comfort her companionship had till then afforded to the bereaved mother was considerably lessened in consequence.

CHAPTER VII.

LORD DONNINGTON, true to his word, anxiously endeavoured to discover the author of the paragraph relating to his granddaughter, and in so doing, as may not unfrequently happen, went far afield in search of what was all the time close at hand. The framer of the plot, untouched by suspicion, had the effrontery to affect the keenest zeal in the question, demanding, in the name of his offended patron, not only an immediate apology for the misstatement, but also that every effort should be used for the detection of the audacious hand from which it proceeded.

The two articles produced little effect in society. No one had credited the report of the marriage;

but, on the other hand, however decisively contradicted, it was a fact beyond dispute that attentions had been paid which might very fairly give rise to it. Lord Henry himself, far from suffering any degree of mortification, was on the whole not dissatisfied. The false security of Lady Emma's friends afforded him the utmost advantage he could yet hope to attain. He felt it necessary to subject himself to greater restraint, but contrived, at the same time, to advance farther than before; for if he now ventured but seldom to hold any separate discourse, his every look and accent, when he did, declared his sentiments more eloquently.

Mr. Selby, meanwhile, had some reason to applaud himself on his stratagem: it furthered his ambitious hopes one degree. The vehement anxiety with which the Marquis now courted his intimacy had unavoidably awakened in his kinsman some suspicion of his ulterior design, nor had his mother been able entirely to conceal that her wishes tended in the same direction. The not unnatural result was a great disinclination to such a union. It was not till he found the

hand of the heiress of Elvastone publicly assigned to another, that he determined to spend one evening at the family mansion. He went in this mood, and returned in another. Catherine had acted justly towards him. Aware, as she was, that there was little chance that his addresses would be favourably received by his cousin, should he ever be inclined to prefer them, she held that he ought not in such a case to find her inveterately prepossessed against him, as a suitor elected in family conclave. The Marquis's injunctions on that point, therefore, had not been fulfilled. No hint, however "delicate and discreet," had been conveyed to Lady Emma; and she had, in consequence, exactly that manner most attractive to Sir Aubrey—modest, yet unembarrassed. Seeing her in society once or twice, he had but regarded her as a pretty, pleasing girl: at home he found her irresistibly engaging. Her family relations he at once perceived were not the most happy. The stately Marquis had nothing of a grandsire's doting partiality; the Marchioness's manner was always cold, often severe, Lady Arabella's positively ill-natured; but she had duty,

patience, kindness for all; and the affectionate confidence she evidently reposed in Catherine happened to tally exactly with feelings of his own; for he, too, cherished a deep regard for one who had been his tutor.

Next morning appeared the contradictory paragraph. Sir Aubrey read it with altered sentiments. Pleased one day to suppose his cousin engaged, he was more glad on the next to find that she was not. That first visit, so reluctantly paid, soon led to as many as he could possibly spare from Parliamentary duty.

Miss Dallas often joined the family party. Her motive, as she assured her "dear Emma," was to console the latter for being rigorously detained at home whenever the Baronet could possibly be expected. But the truth was, that three years having elapsed since her introduction into society, she had become a little weary of the ceaseless whirl, and inclined rather seriously to a more settled condition. The high rank and splendid fortune Sir Aubrey was to inherit, combined with the political distinction he had already acquired, rendered him incomparably the most

advantageous match of the day; and Miss Dallas, holding herself entitled to the best of every thing that earth afforded, regarded him therefore as her lawful property. It was a point of importance with her to meet him thus frequently in private intercourse, for she had wit enough to discern him to be one of those men whose hearts defy the desultory assaults of general society. In point of beauty Lady Emma, she could not be wholly unaware, much surpassed her; but she was disposed to flatter herself he might think differently, as he happened one day, in criticizing a painting, to imply that he admired dark eyes more than blue. She relied also much on other powers of attraction. Her musical talents were remarkable; she had, moreover, read a good deal, and took every occasion to bring forward her stores of knowledge; while Lady Emma, more particularly diffident in the presence of a man of high endowments, rarely spoke on any but ordinary topics. Yet, with all her efforts, she totally failed in making an impression on Sir Aubrey. If he ever thought of her when not present, it was only to chafe at her undesired volubility, but for which

he might, perhaps, have elicited the opinions of his more interesting kinswoman.

His position with the latter was painful: he could not but be sensible that some invisible barrier impeded his efforts to approach more nearly. From the moment that a suspicion of his wishes dawned upon her, she steadily sought to repress them. Yet she fully recognized his merits, the more clearly, indeed, as contrasting strongly with the defects of his favoured rival. Against her will she acquired a perception of a kind of excellence with which Lord Henry was not adorned. Loving him not at all the less, she longed to inspire him with nobler sentiments. The first favourable opportunity was afforded by a chance remark: "Your friend Miss Dallas is late in appearing this evening."

"I am in hopes," Lady Emma rejoined, "she will not come at all. Her father is ill: he caught a severe cold in leaving the House last night."

"Poor Sir Richard!" said Lord Henry, in a tone of somewhat contemptuous compassion: "his patriotic exertions cost him rather dear."

"Yet I think," she replied, "that if he were my

father I could hardly wish him less diligent in attendance: it is so meritorious."

"Undoubtedly; and the consequences are most honourable. Our veterans may justly glory in their tokens of service: catarrhs and rheumatisms are the scars of hard-fought battles."

"I am serious," said Lady Emma. "I highly esteem Sir Richard, and cannot but think it would be well if younger Members would imitate his example."

"May I take that admonition as addressed to myself? It would need nothing more to incite me to reform, were I conscious of neglect of duty. But, I must humbly represent, I hear no complaints from my constituents. Allow me to ask whence this evil report proceeds. I should very much like to trace my traducer."

"So far as I know, there is no such person in existence. My conclusion was founded entirely on my own observations. I supposed you attended but seldom, because I hardly ever see your name on the lists of divisions."

His eyes sparkled as he heard her ingenuous reply.

"You have indeed given me a most satisfactory explanation," he said, "which at once removes all grounds of complaint. I know not what I could more earnestly desire than to be thus missed!"

Then, changing his manner as he saw her deeply confused at having thus betrayed the attentive interest with which she marked his proceedings, he added, with more reverential tenderness, "I am indeed profoundly grateful for the notice you have taken of my absence. It is very true that I seldom appear in those records, except when important interests are at stake, in which case I am no defaulter. To assist in carrying or defeating great measures, according as may be required, is, I assure you, the degree of attendance paid by two-thirds of the House, and suffices to keep the State machine in regular order. Will you not grant that I have satisfactorily vindicated my public character?"

"Not altogether," she replied. "What special excuse can you plead for only partially fulfilling your obligations? If every one thought himself at liberty to act as you do, in what way could national affairs be conducted?"

Lord Henry regarded her, as she spoke thus, with the peculiar smile man is wont to bestow on the object of his affections when he considers her to be discussing matters somewhat above her sphere, as one who, proudly conscious of his own superiority of intellect, finds yet a charm in the very defects of hers, at once disdaining and delighting in her little feminine presumption.

"There is no cause to fear," he answered: "there will always be a sufficient number of those who, like Sir Richard Dallas, volunteer indefatigable assiduity. It would rather hinder than further the progress of business if every Member followed the same plan. A large proportion of Acts may as well be disposed of in a thin House as a full one. For my own part, I confess that no applause which the closest attendance could earn would recompense me for foregoing such moments as these!"

He had barely time for this impassioned avowal: the Duchess of Ilminster approached. Her Grace's vigilance was exerted rather too late: it might now cross and thwart him, but could not effectually impede his success.

But Love, all-potent sovereign as he is, cannot command the entire thoughts of his lieges. Those of our young heroine were now a good deal occupied by a projected bazaar, to be held on the beautiful grounds of a villa at Twickenham. The Duchess assured her niece that she could never have a better opportunity of seeing the proper style of conducting such affairs.

"These things have become so very frequent," she observed, "that it really demands no small share of talent to make them endurable. The difficulty of striking out a single novelty is extreme. But dear Lady Ormsby has so happy an invention, and the site is so particularly advantageous, that I do flatter myself it will prove unique. And then, above all, no promiscuous crowd! She assures me she is quite determined that there shall not be too free a distribution of tickets; and very right she is. Once throw your gates open to all who choose to present themselves, and you find yourself elbowed *sans cérémonie* by a sort of people there is no describing. Really, I have often suffered great annoyance in this way. One tries to laugh it off, but the jest is a little too rude."

Miss Dallas thought very differently on this question.

"Exclude the multitude!" she cried: "far better admit them more freely. Every one knows that the best part of the amusement is the number of strange figures drawn together. If none but those of *haut ton* be present, it will, no doubt, be 'uncommonly select,' as her Grace would say, but I will venture to predict it will also be found intolerably flat."

Lady Emma's interest lay far more in the preparations than in the anticipation of the day itself.

"It is a great pleasure," she said to Catherine, "to be engaged in something which is to be of use to others. I am very unfortunate in that respect: I can give no comfort to any one. Lady Donnington, I know, does not believe I have any feeling for her grief; and in my grandfather's eyes I am no more than a semi-heiress of his—all which makes me often painfully sensible of being utterly useless. Elizabeth laughs at me for this complaint; but it is a very real one. Therefore I think these bazaars an excellent inven-

tion. I should like to be always working for one of them."

Catherine's aid on this occasion was extremely serviceable, particularly in the selection of materials for the different kinds of work. Being one day thus engaged in a shop peculiarly rich in varieties of choice, her attention was withdrawn by the entrance of a middle-aged woman, very poorly clad, who stood a moment as if afraid to explain the object of her coming.

"Oh, you want to know about your screens," said the mistress of the shop, taking down a small parcel. "I'm sorry to say we can't sell them."

"Not one?" asked the poor woman, in a tone of deep dejection.

"No; I assure you I've done all I could; but trade is not what it was with us: these bazaars carry it all off."

The stranger hastily departed, and Catherine, affected by her look of utter despondency, could not forbear inquiring into her history. It was one too often to be heard. Two sisters, born in the rank of gentlewomen, had for years supported themselves by the sale of fancy works; but the

elder having lost the use of her hands, the burden of their joint maintenance had fallen entirely on the younger, the last of whose repeated disappointments Catherine had just witnessed. It chanced, a few hours later, that while walking in the square she descried the same unhappy stranger in the act of advancing to Lord Donnington's door. But just then one leaf flew open, and she retreated in alarm at the apparition of two tall, richly-liveried footmen. When they had disappeared, however, the intended knock was given, though by an ill-assured hand. The old porter, on surveying the lowly object before him, seemed not a little provoked at having been so needlessly disturbed, and indignantly motioned away a letter tendered to him. The hopeless petitioner walked feebly a few steps, then paused, as if in the irresolution of one who knows not where else to apply. Catherine hastened to join her, and from her own lips heard the repetition of her tale, in words of simple pathos. The name of Lady Arabella Vere, set forth as one of the patronesses of the approaching bazaar, had caught her eye; and as her sister had formerly the honour of giving her Ladyship

lessons in embroidery, the hope had arisen that she might be induced to take some of their work, and thus exercise at once a twofold beneficence. Catherine knew Lady Arabella too well to afford much encouragement on that point, but her own little gift was accompanied by the cheering assurance that there were other ladies in the family who might not be unlikely to contribute more effectual aid.

And the Marchioness did give attention to the story, for she knew herself bound to give, by Scriptural precept. Nevertheless her feelings were not deeply touched: the haunts of poverty were to her unknown, and she had no vivid sympathy with its woes.

"There seems to have been great improvidence in this case," said she. "By their own account these sisters were at one time able to maintain themselves respectably: why did they not then make provision against sickness and reverses?"

"It is more difficult than your Ladyship can well imagine," Catherine replied, "when means are so scanty, to reserve any thing for future emergency. Present want demands the whole."

"Well," replied Lady Donnington, "it is a point to be ascertained. I do not like to give to those who have brought trouble on their own heads. I shall be glad if you will inquire fully into the story."

Lady Emma expressed her compassion with the undoubting ardour of youth.

"How very sad! how painful it is to think of such melancholy stories! When I am rich I am sure I shall think it the greatest of pleasures to give—I mean, more than such a trifle as this."

Catherine received the donation most willingly, but she asked, with a smile, half playful, half earnest, "*When* you are rich, my dear Emma! May I ask what meaning you attach to that phrase?"

"What is it to be rich? Why, I should say it consists in having more money than one has any occasion for. Now that, I assure you, is not at all my case. I really do not think I am profuse, yet I never find my allowance sufficient. I certainly could not call myself rich, unless by comparison."

"By that mode of computation you never will be; for even when you have acceded to your

inheritance you will still see many in possession of larger fortunes."

"Yes; but it will make all the difference: there will then be a considerable surplus for the demands of the unfortunate."

Catherine shook her head.

"You will not find it so," said she, "unless you previously learn how to regulate the distribution of a smaller sum."

But it was a subject on which she was hopeful: life's lessons yet to come might exalt into consistent principle what now seemed but as the impulses of a kind and generous nature.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATHERINE was soon able to satisfy the doubts of the Marchioness as to the need and the merits of the sisters Morland, and accordingly became the delegate of her bounty. The lodging whither she repaired, in fulfilment of this office, was in an obscure quarter of St. George's parish, a poverty-stricken region in the heart of wealth and grandeur.

"Two-pair back," was the laconic answer obtained from a surly-looking man occupied in repairing a well-worn coat. In the act of ascending the crazy stairs Catherine was startled by the violent slamming of a door, and instantly a tall, masculine-looking woman, her features inflamed by wrath, came rushing down upon her with considerable force.

"Beg pardon!—the Morlands? yes, they do live here; but I think, my Lady, you won't like to go up there."

On being assured, however, that such was "my Lady's" purpose, she led the way to the room she had just quitted, and withdrew, though not till she had received a direct intimation that her presence was not desired. The invalid sister lay shaking on a miserable bed, her landlady having just overwhelmed her with reproaches on the non-payment of the last two weeks' rent. But soothed by a stranger voice speaking kindly, she soon regained the usual serene composure of her manner. In fact, lamentable as was her individual condition, her spirit was not worn as was that of her unfortunate companion in trouble. The one dwelt in peace on the superintending providence of God, while the other experienced the harsh repulse or cold indifference of man. In consequence, the former accepted the relief brought to her with deep thankfulness, but with no symptom of surprise; while the dim eyes of the latter, who shortly after came in, told how little expectation she had dared to cherish of a favourable result to the

promised application on their behalf. Catherine consolingly assured them that they were not likely to be again reduced to a state of destitution, Lady Donnington being too conscientious to withdraw her aid when once satisfied that it was not ill bestowed.

On coming down she had a short colloquy with the mistress of the house, whose visage now assumed a much more benign aspect.

"I'm sure, my Lady," said she, "no one can say I am hard on them as lodge with me; but times is bad, my husband gets but little by his trade, and we look to our lodgers to make up our rent; so we can't afford to wait for our money; and that's all, my Lady, as ever I said to the Miss Morlands."

It was true in effect, no doubt, however roughly it might have been said. These people were but a few grades above the extremity of distress which reigned around them. How many did Catherine see in that one narrow street needing succour perhaps as much as those to whom she had been commissioned to convey it! Men and women broken down with age and infirmity, children untaught, uncared for—what wide employment

was there for superabundant money, for weary vacancies of time!

Such were the thoughts which chiefly occupied Catherine on her way to fulfil an engagement of a very different kind. Just before she started she had received a note from Lady Coningsby, requesting the pleasure of seeing her early that morning. The handsome hall in Hamilton Place offered the strongest possible contrast to the scenes through which she had just passed. Lady Coningsby's lovely children, on their way for the morning walk, tripped lightly down the spacious staircase in eager admiration of a profusion of plants brought for evening decoration. Gladly would Catherine have lingered to watch them, bounding from shrub to shrub, and lawlessly plucking whatever most caught their fancy; but the footman knew that it was his business to escort her without delay to the presence of their mamma. In the place specially appropriated to confidential communications, the boudoir itself, stood the Viscountess, as if in contemplation of a beautiful statuette, the Muse Erato, fixed conspicuously on a pedestal.

"My latest acquisition," said she, in answer to Catherine's admiring remarks. "You will not perhaps esteem it less highly when you know who is the donor. Here is the accompanying autograph," taking a letter from a case richly lined with purple velvet. "Is it not most flatteringly gracious?"

The epistle was from a foreign potentate, who piqued himself on a taste for English literature, in acknowledgment of a volume of her Ladyship's poems humbly transmitted for his acceptance, and was indeed most lavish in encomium. Catherine, who had read the productions thus extolled without being able to rank them at all above mediocrity, was somewhat embarrassed lest her own opinion might be called for; but, happily for her, Lady Coningsby was in haste to exhibit other marks of distinction. Opening an elegant cabinet, "Here," said she, "are other trophies, which in the estimation of one of my pursuits are not less precious—the unreserved correspondence of many distinguished foreigners. I could not, for very modesty, show their effusions; but just read their names!"—pointing to labels

on the different drawers. "The sage Von Stockmar, profound metaphysician as he is, disdains not discussion, you see, with my feminine intellect. Here reposes an abstract of the schemes of the enlightened Foustinberg, too bold, perhaps, for immediate propagation. And here I am honoured with the earliest intimation of the amazing discoveries the great Pellegrini has lately imparted to mankind!"

The names of these illustrious writers were wholly new to Catherine (as we suspect they will also prove to our readers); but as her Ladyship partially opened the drawers, she saw that they did each contain a packet of foreign letters, and was content to believe her statement as to the value of the collection. Other treasures were then displayed, of whose worth she could form a rather better judgment—articles of *virtu*, cameos, medals, enamels, &c. She looked, listened, and admired, and when the exhibition seemed to be concluded, rose to depart. The action produced a sudden change in Lady Coningsby's manner.

"You are not going yet!" she exclaimed, in

a tone for the first time entirely natural: "not yet, surely? Do you think I asked you here to show these things? Oh, no, no!"—passionately clasping her hands—"it was to declare that all is utterly worthless to me! When you came pride revolted: I sought to make you believe me happy. It is a part I am ever playing. I deceive all the world, but never, never for a moment can I impose on myself!"

She rose, her hands still pressed together. There was a too visible study of effect, but yet it was not a wholly unreal manifestation of distress.

"I am sorry to see you unhappy," said Catherine, in simple truth.

"Unhappy!" repeated the Viscountess, her tone and manner becoming yet more dramatic; "say, rather, wretched! What a fate is mine! Unhappy I was when I first met you—but now! Oh, that irrevocable, fatal marriage vow! Do you not remember, at Beaulieu, warning me against throwing away the treasure I then possessed, the true attachment of an honourable mind? How often, how bitterly do I recall that short pause of doubt! Oh, had I heeded you then!"

"There is surely little use," Catherine gravely replied, "in recalling long-past occurrences. Whether wisely made or not, a wife has only to abide by her choice."

"It is true," answered the Viscountess, not seeming to have apprehended the appeal to her sense of conjugal duty; "you are right: the remembrance of that day does make me too wretched. I ought to banish it. But, alas, Miss Mansfield, there is a cruel thought connected with it which rivets it on my memory for ever! Were I but single in my self-created woe—but to have involved another! Think what it is to have doomed one worthy of all felicity to the same regrets which gnaw for ever at my own heart!"

Catherine had great tolerance for the foibles of her fellow-creatures, but she could not consent to flatter them. Seeing clearly that the Viscountess exulted in believing her charms to have had the wondrous effect of inflicting an incurable wound on the heart of a man who had passed hardly a fortnight in her society, she answered the affected self-condemnation as if she had supposed it real.

"I do not think there can be any reason for entertaining so very melancholy a persuasion. Mr. Herbert appeared to possess too much good sense to surrender himself to such vehement and lasting affliction."

Lady Coningsby's brief reply evinced no inconsiderable degree of pique.

"He has never married," said she, emphatically.

"That is not surprising," answered Catherine, quietly. "An early disappointment often renders men more than commonly cautious; but he is still in the prime of life, and may very probably set your conscience completely at rest on that point."

It did not surprise Catherine to find her anodyne not very gratefully received. Her Ladyship made an effort to express a hope that it might be as her comforter anticipated, but was unable to render the sentence intelligible. Sullen displeasure clouded the beauty of her countenance, and checked for a while the flow of her complaints. But as they really did spring from a hidden depth of dissatisfaction with herself and her condition, she soon again sought relief in speech.

"Mine is a peculiar nature: it may be doubted whether under any circumstances whatever I could have been happy. But there was much of bitter truth in the sentiments of the foreigner you heard here the other day, disguised as it was by his absurd jargon. Mortal being is in itself a weariness: day after day the same trivialities, the same utter want of motive!"

A reply rose to Catherine's lips from her inmost heart, but it was not uttered. With such a woman how could she dwell on the one all-sufficient motive which Christian faith supplies? To her own personal advantages only could the latter's attention be diverted with any chance of effect.

"You are the mother of a lovely family."

"You really think them pretty?" answered Lady Coningsby, with a languid smile.

"Exceedingly—the second above all."

"Clementina! why nobody reckons *her* like me," replied the mother, with much *naïveté*.

"When they are with you life can hardly be a burden!"

"Well, no doubt, they are dear, engaging little creatures; but it is impossible to have them much

about me. It is too bad to ask a man of colossal intellect to favour you with an hour or two of his company, and molest him all the time with the frolics of a set of pigmies."

"But I was not proposing that you should introduce them to your literary friends: I thought only how much delight they must afford you when you are disengaged."

"Undoubtedly; but those moments of leisure are fewer than you may suppose. You forget that I have not only to entertain my distinguished guests, but to qualify myself for that part—to read, reflect, compose. All this is hardly compatible with nursery cares: as for those of the school-room—oh, horror!"

But Catherine held her ground.

"Maternal obligation," she replied, "must surely be paramount to every other."

"On the surface of the question it would seem so," answered Lady Coningsby; "but you must consider—I speak it in all humility—there are not many females capable of taking the lead in intellectual assemblies. A mother's part may be always, under her affectionate superintendence,

adequately fulfilled by delegates; but if a woman of decided literary taste, and, it may be, talent also, foregoes the office nature thus expressly assigns her, who shall supply the vacancy? I do assure you I should delight to consecrate my whole existence to my darlings, but—it were mere affectation to deny it—the *savans* of our age are unanimous in declaring that there are claims upon me of a more peculiar kind. They frequent my house, they initiate me in their pursuits: what can I do? It is vain for me to resist their importunities——"

The visitant, fully convinced that nothing she could say would be of much service to one so misjudging and so heartless, once more rose to depart. Her Ladyship's cordiality was so completely restored by the agreeable ideas just awakened in her mind, that she even proceeded so far as to give something like an invitation to her *soirées*.

"I *should* like you to come in," said she, holding Catherine's hand in hers, "just to hear, and see, and judge for yourself what an exquisite gratification high literary society really does afford!"

"I am much obliged, but I could not leave Lady Donnington."

"Ah, the Marchioness! *un peu exigeante*, I dare say. But *à propos* to this, my dear niece Lady Emma, I never see her now: can you tell me the reason? I really am very anxious about her: I want so much to know how her affairs go on." Then seeing that Catherine hesitated how to reply, she continued, somewhat haughtily, "Oh, I don't want to betray you into indiscreet disclosures! As all the world are talking about it, I thought I had no reason to forbear the question, especially considering the relationship between us."

It was evident that entire silence would be construed as an affront; Catherine therefore answered, guardedly, "If I rightly understand your Ladyship, I can only say that Lord Donnington is quite averse to such a union."

"Ah, doubtless! and parental opposition is a formidable bar. Poor dear Emma! I am afraid she has a great deal to go through. I do not at all wonder at her predilection: no one would who ever saw its object. By the way, I remember you met him here."

"His appearance and manners are certainly highly prepossessing."

"Oh, he is delightful! quite my idea of perfection. Indeed, he turns every body's head. The men all take it as the highest compliment to be thought to resemble him, even in a blemish; and as for the women, they absolutely rave! But you do not seem to share in this enthusiasm: are you enlisted against him?"

"I would gladly hear any thing which told to his credit."

"Ah, but I doubt you are judging him rather hardly! There is really nothing much against him—imprudent, thoughtless, that is all. And yet you must not suppose that his conduct is approved: he is only exceedingly admired, which is quite a different thing."

"A difference which I am afraid it must be very hard for him to discern."

"Not so, I assure you: being, as he is, an especial favourite of mine, I frequently give him a good deal of salutary advice. He had the benefit of a long lecture in this very room not many evenings ago. I conjured up the shades of his ancestors,

warriors, statesmen, and all, to rebuke his degenerate trifling. And it really was not without effect: he owned that my exhortations were as likely as another's to make an impression. You don't think that was making much way, perhaps; but it was, after his manner. The Duke of Delaval has no influence whatever. Elder brothers seldom have; and in this case the very high character of the one is a disadvantage to the other: it creates a total want of sympathy. No; it must be a work for gentle touches, woman's tender hand, I am convinced!"

"For one, then, especially authorized to offer her advice," replied Catherine, very gravely.

"He has no sister," answered Lady Coningsby. "Oh, I see! I do believe you are thinking of poor little Emma! I really can hardly call her any thing else, she retains so much of early simplicity. But, do you know, I question her being able to make a permanent impression on Lord Henry. Her very personal attractions are of a sort which seldom give rise to a lasting sentiment. She smiles upon you with those soft blue eyes, and you think her for the moment really pretty; but

five minutes afterwards her countenance has faded from recollection: how, then, can it subdue the heart? I can never think she can captivate him lastingly. With all his errors, he surely has a capacity for appreciating something higher than Emma Vere!"

And her Ladyship, drawing her lips together, gave a very marked expression to her final words.

"However," she presently resumed, "this conversation is most opportune. The truth is, I am half afraid that the infrequency of her visits here of late may be attributed to a latent feeling of mistrust, or—shall I say it?—jealousy!"

The last word was delivered in the softest possible cadence. It was repeated by Catherine simply in a tone of surprise.

"Jealousy! I do not understand your Ladyship. How can Lady Emma entertain such a feeling in relation to you?"

"Reasonably she cannot, certainly; but girls in love will harass themselves with the vainest apprehensions. It really pains me so much as to mention it—but there is no denying that I do possess a very decided influence over him on

whom her youthful fancy has fixed; and I own that it is no matter of indifference to me. It is a high and ennobling hope, that to my feminine counsels may be due his awakening at length to the lofty pursuits proper to his station. But, favourite object as it is, it shall be gladly sacrificed to dear Emma's tranquillity. Will you kindly make her understand this? It really grieves me that she should have any doubt on this point."

"Do not disturb yourself with so vain a fear. How can Lady Emma dread any thing like rivalry on the part of one already married? It is quite unnecessary for me to attempt to dispel such a suspicion: it can never for a moment have been entertained."

Lady Coningsby was abashed. She saw that she was thoroughly understood. She felt that Catherine, in treating coquetry as a thing in her case out of all contemplation, did in fact pointedly reprehend her for having indulged in it. So thoroughly was she humbled, indeed, that had a stranger witnessed their final parting, he might almost have reversed their positions, mistaking the lady of high rank for the inferior.

As Catherine left this fine mansion, a vivid remembrance arose in her mind of the day, some thirteen years ago, when she had first seen its mistress. She heard, as it were, the repining sigh of the weary governess for "a happy change in life!" It had come, far exceeding her wish: her brightest day-dream was more than realized. But what was the result? She declared herself utterly wretched in her elevation. Much would Catherine have preferred, if compelled to change conditions, to be helpless, destitute, dependent on casual alms, like the object of her first visit, than such as she whom she had just quitted, the handsome, accomplished, admired Lady Coningsby.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LADY ARABELLA VERE was not among the most active patronesses of the projected bazaar. She willingly gave the scheme the sanction of her noble name, but further trouble took she none. The few works she began were soon abandoned to her waiting-maid, but with strict injunctions to have them all ready by the appointed day. The latter, for a time, confined her murmurs to the ears of her fellow-servants; but when her lady superadded to these commands that of making a dress, selected specially for the occasion, the habit of submission yielded to despair. She declared the execution of both orders to be beyond her powers, but, to screen herself from displeasure, suggested that Miss

Mansfield, no doubt, had plenty of time, and must be exceedingly happy to assist her Ladyship. The first conclusion was entirely contrary to fact, Catherine having devoted whatever leisure the Marchioness left her to Lady Emma's aid; nevertheless, at whatever sacrifice of her own convenience, she complied with this request. Far differently did the aunt and niece requite her obliging readiness, the one treating her as a kind of animated machine which had, dexterously enough, wrought its allotted task; the other ever fearing to encroach, and acknowledging with eager thanks each several act of help.

Lady Emma's personal diligence was highly gratifying to Sir Aubrey. He had become no infrequent morning visitor, and was much pleased to observe that, intent on her occupations, she would sometimes forget her studied distance of demeanour, and look and speak with the ease their relationship permitted. This was more especially the case one afternoon, when Catherine, who was generally present, had left them together. After respectfully watching the progress made on a water-colour drawing from the other side of the

room, he felt emboldened to take a nearer view. But the movement much disturbed the artist. Hastily covering her work, "Pardon me," she said, "for not allowing you a laugh at my expense."

"Laugh!" he repeated, in an accent of unfeigned surprise.

"Not openly; but in your heart, I know you must. I am well aware how judges in art view lady-sketchers."

"You make me pay dearly for the reputation, if I have it," he replied, turning away with an expression of real disappointment.

She gave way at once. "Come, the point is really not worth contention, especially as the precious performance is so soon to be subjected to public criticism."

The latter part of this reply was not intelligible to Sir Aubrey, but he forgot to speculate on its meaning in his pleasure when the drawing was uncovered. His exclamation, "Why, this is admirable!" sounded so heartily sincere that Lady Emma could not but be gratified, though she treated it as if spoken ironically.

"Praise undeserved is satire in disguise," she repeated, smilingly: "an often-written, well-remembered text."

"Quite inapplicable in this case," he answered, warmly. "I will pledge whatever judgment I may be thought to possess on its being an uncommonly clever sketch."

"For a female amateur," she interposed. "Well, I will confess my own unassisted vanity had already carried me the length of concluding it to be my happiest work. I suppose the subject inspired me. You recognize it, I hope? Tredegar Tower: the first rood of British ground—was it not?—on which a Vere planted the foot of a master. To own the truth, I hardly think I should have been allowed to depict the venerable ruin if my purpose had been suspected. Would Lord Donnington have permitted the humblest attempt at its likeness to be set on sale at a fancy bazaar? My conscience is somewhat uneasy on that point."

Sir Aubrey experienced here a disagreeable shock. What scruples the head of his house might entertain he knew not; but he had his own, and they were strong.

"I confess," said he, "I much dislike these artificial modes of upholding charities. I wish to see them wholly independent of indirect and precarious supplies. Besides, I once saw a specimen of these bazaars which disgusted me for life."

"Indeed! the folly must have been glaring which could produce so lasting an impression. But there may be a considerable improvement since then. I really flatter myself it is so, and that by the time I myself arrive at the dignity of stall-holding every thing will be conducted with the most irreproachable sobriety."

Sir Aubrey caught eagerly at the last words.

"You have not, then, yourself undertaken the office of sale?"

"No; they are all married ladies, except Miss Ormsby and Aunt Arabella."

His brow cleared: he now stood in admiring contemplation, it might seem of the work, it might be of the artist.

"I much grudge this fanciful affair the appropriation of this little sketch," he presently said. "Before I knew its destination I had almost

summoned boldness enough to ask it for my own collection. As a Vere," he added, fearing she might take alarm at this approach to familiarity, "I thought I had some title to prefer the request. Really," he continued, a moment after, "I cannot forego my wish. Since it is a question of sale, I have at least as good a right as another to become the purchaser."

"You do me too much honour," she replied, playfully bowing her head. "Once on the spot, perhaps you will find something better worth the carrying away. But you shall not have to accuse me of inveigling you into a too great loss of time: our market-place is as far remote as Twickenham."

"Be it so," he answered; "only let me know the day."

She named it, adding, as she saw him enter it in his memoranda, "It must look somewhat incongruous—'Lady Ormsby's Villa—Fancy Bazaar'!"

"It does not stand in those terms. The single word Tredegar is enough."

So marked an expression accompanied his words that Lady Emma was instantly conscious of having

unheedingly encouraged the hope she had hitherto so carefully repressed. One interview, perhaps, had undone the effect of weeks of steadfast repulse. She hastily attempted to retrieve her error.

"I really think," said she, "that I ought to receive the thanks of the patronesses for contriving to procure them the chance of one customer at least. I doubt if any of my fellow-contributors have been so much on the alert."

She spoke in visible confusion; but Sir Aubrey very pardonably misinterpreted the cause: he could not, in the tumult of his own feelings, discern the true nature of hers. The blush of alarm, lest she should incautiously have occasioned him the bitterness of disappointment, so heightened the charms of her countenance that he was obliged to hurry away, lest he should be betrayed into saying more than he could yet hope she would consent to hear. Having considerably out-stayed his usual time in Grosvenor Square, the extraordinary speed with which he drove down to the House seemed to his servant fairly enough accounted for. But the excitement lay deeper: it was the having, for the first time, found a visit

there productive of something like hope which urged him on so fast to a place where such visions could be no more indulged. Not, however, till he had undergone the sobering process of presenting a formidable budget of petitions was he in secret soul his ordinary self, though his outward demeanour betrayed nothing of what was passing there.

The Twickenham Bazaar, if not absolutely "unique," was certainly as agreeable as any such exhibition can be, having great advantages of site, to which those of weather were fortunately superadded. A semicircle of stalls, laden with pretty, and in many instances even beautiful commodities, were ranged on a wide, verdant lawn, sloping gently to the brink of the river; and a number of pleasure-boats, with gay pennants fluttering in the breeze, contributed much to the animation of the scene. The assemblage was very large; so much having been said of the difficulty of obtaining tickets that the demand had been positively urgent. The Duchess of Ilminster had not the gratification of seeing her predictions fulfilled: slight indisposition kept her at home; but her niece was

present, under the *chaperonage* of Lady Margaret Vere; and the arrangement was agreeable to both. They strolled and gazed, loitered and purchased, and were resting beneath an acacia, engaged in a very pleasant conversation, when they were joined by Miss Dallas, full of sarcastic remarks on the company.

"After all, though," she concluded, "it is a wofully stupid affair! This is the result of making it so 'extremely select.'"

"There seems to be sufficient amusement, Elizabeth, for those who can derive it from sheer ill-nature," said Lady Emma, absolutely wearied out.

"What an ungracious return for my efforts for your diversion, my dear! No doubt, for the observing there is no lack; but still, I do assure you, the absence of the intelligent multitude is a serious deprivation. The incessant exclamations of wonder; the 'Oh, do look here!' 'See there!' the visible anxiety to study each one of the 'great ladies,' and know her for all time; the careful scanning of dress for profitable hints hereafter—all this, and much more, which the good souls brought with them, did really make a charity sale

worth attending. But here, instead of finding matter for mirth scattered freely over the surface, we are obliged to exert some degree of labour for that precious commodity. Now, Lady Margaret, let me appeal to you: do you not recognize this capital defect?"

"Pardon me, I never saw any set of people whom I should have held myself entitled to mark as subjects of ridicule. Such conduct would have seemed to me to degrade those who indulged in it far below any inoffensive person of the humblest class."

These words were not spoken without some degree of emotion, for all Lady Margaret's feelings were profound, and it was her cherished conviction that genuine courtesy should be the invariable accompaniment of high station. She broke off the conversation by rising to speak to a friend who came near. Miss Dallas affected to smother a tittering laugh.

"Excuse me, I see you look duly solemn under the edifying lecture, but my muscles are not so well under control. I will own, too, that I have taken a similar liberty elsewhere. Just look yonder ——"

"My own aunt!" exclaimed Lady Emma, indignantly.

"Forgive me, dear: she is irresistible! Do but mark the gracious smile as each gentle knight draws near."

"Really, Elizabeth, you exceed all patience."

"Don't take it amiss: what is it to you? The folly is hers only, but you cannot pretend not to see it. At her age, and with hardly a trace of beauty remaining, to be playing the girl before all the world, and expecting to find some poor mortal blind enough not to know the difference!"

The sarcasm was not undeserved, but Miss Dallas was not so well entitled to launch it as she thought herself. Though she might never, under any circumstances, lay herself open to derision, it was neither delicacy of feeling nor elevation of principle which would preserve her from the danger. In these endowments she was as totally wanting as the object of her scorn.

Lady Arabella had been irritated to an extreme degree by finding herself in a very unfavourable position. Her coadjutrix on the one side was a

young married lady, who had really done some violence to her own inclination in accepting so conspicuous an office. This could hardly be supposed to be the case with Miss Ormsby, whose air certainly evinced some practice in enduring the gaze of a throng. But she was pretty, good-humoured, and thoroughly intent on the business of the day, supplying each demand with graceful alacrity. Between these two, each highly attractive in her way, the haughty daughter of the Marquis of Donnington found it impossible to obtain the smallest share of notice for her wares and herself; while, to enhance her mortification, she could perceive that her more fortunate companions were far from unobservant of her want of success. Consumed by resentment, she still endeavoured to draw each gentleman who approached into that kind of loitering attendance which she saw them willingly bestow elsewhere. Miss Dallas could no longer be content with heedfully observing these weaknesses: springing up to meet her father, "Now, my dear, good Papa," she eagerly whispered, holding him by the arm, "you are come in the happiest moment:

I was just wishing for you! It is really very strange, but poor Lady Arabella cannot find a single customer, though, for aught I see, her goods are as pretty as another's. There is something in it I cannot at all understand. I feel quite concerned for her; and I want you to come with me and try to turn the tide."

The good-natured Baronet was easily brought to compliance.

"With all my heart, my dear; only, as before, you must take the choice on yourself. I hardly know the names of these knickknacks."

"Oh, yes, yes; I'll take it all upon myself! Let me see—ah, I know!—you want a watch-guard, Papa; you do indeed! I have told you so a hundred times."

The Baronet's countenance clouded a little. It was, indeed, a point of contention between them; almost the only one in which he had persisted in withstanding his beloved child. He was one of those who rather prefer to anticipate the advance of age in their habits and apparel than to attempt to keep pace with the fopperies of their juniors. He answered the suggestion now made only by

taking out his watch and gazing meditatively on the massive chain.

"It was your first plaything, my dear," he said, his memory picturing her fondly as the infant solace of his saddest hours of widowhood.

"I can quite believe it," was her unsympathizing reply, "for I remember it all my life. Nay, more, I really should not wonder if you took it to school!"

"Just so," he replied, very gravely. "It was your grandmother's last gift: she died soon after."

Miss Dallas paused enough for decorum's sake at this rejoinder, and then proceeded thus: "Well, dear Papa, I grant it is good and precious, quite a valuable relic; but times and fashions do change, and *indeed* it is somewhat out of date. But that is not exactly the present question: it will be enough for poor Lady Arabella's credit if you do but make a purchase, whether you put it to use or not."

The good-natured Baronet went accordingly, led by a treacherous child, who, for the gratification of her own malicious humour, hesitated not to expose him to the chance of a disagreeable

rebuff. She had watched her opportunity well. There was a certain nobleman, the Duke of Dromore, whom the beauties of thirty seasons had successively dazzled in vain. He was little troubled now: the most experienced match-hunters had given him up in despair. But Lady Arabella was not so judicious. It would be so exceedingly desirable! A Duchess at last! and likely, as the wife of an elderly husband, to have an ample share of conjugal dominion! She could not relinquish so attractive an object. Wherever he appeared, without doors or within, she constantly sought to win his attention. The affair had become proverbial among their acquaintance. "That will be when a certain lady marries a certain Duke" was frequently said in reference to an utterly hopeless pursuit. The critical moment when this nobleman, in slow progress around the semicircle, had arrived within one of her who so anxiously desired the honour of his custom, was precisely that selected by Miss Dallas for thwarting her Ladyship's designs. The latter was so intently occupied in watching the movements of his Grace as to betray involuntary surprise when two figures paused before

her stall. On recognizing the father and daughter her manner became particularly stiff; for the contempt entertained for her by the latter was reciprocated by violent aversion on her side. Far from courting them as purchasers, she was evidently inclined to dismiss them speedily; but this petulance, being the very disposition Miss Dallas desired to provoke, had only the effect of keeping her more steadily to her purpose. When her Ladyship coldly answered that she was afraid she could not satisfy the demand, Miss Dallas innocently rejoined, "All sold? Then we must look elsewhere. But no; here are several remaining. There, Papa; take your choice among them."

Choice Sir Richard had really none: he despised the whole collection heartily, as one of the most foolish of modern novelties.

"Papa is a little fastidious," said Miss Dallas, apologetically: "he does not readily decide in such matters. I hope your Ladyship has not found gentlemen in general so difficult? But I beg pardon! I am afraid I intercept your view"—moving hastily, so as to show that she clearly saw that the noble *marchande*, utterly regardless of her

duties, was elongating her neck to the utmost in close observation of the Duke. He was now in the act of quitting Lady Altringham's stall. Could she but catch his eye!

The tall, robust form of Sir Richard, and the ample dimensions of his daughter's garments, impeded her efforts most provokingly. His Grace, particularly near-sighted on that occasion, it would appear, passed behind her customers, said a few words to her neighbour, Miss Ormsby, then marched on, with the evident intention of quitting the place altogether. Lady Arabella's vexation was visible enough greatly to delight Miss Dallas.

"Your Ladyship has still a charming variety of goods on hand," said she, with an air of simplicity. "It will draw a crowd around you presently. Every body will be glad to find there is still something to be had: the sale has been so uncommonly rapid! Come, dear Papa, you like this, I am sure!"

Very sure she was that he did not like it at all, but he took it nevertheless.

"It will do," he answered: "I'll not tire Lady Arabella's patience any longer. There, take it,"

he added, as they walked away; "but mind, I'm not going to wear it!"

"That remains to be seen," said his daughter to herself, with a complacent smile on her lips.

The Baronet was vexed at his own unusual discomposure. "I don't know that we did the poor lady much service," said he: "it seemed to me that we left her rather worse than we found her."

Miss Dallas, triumphant in mischief, was highly amused by the remark.

"Dear, good Papa!" thought she, "what is there into which I could not lead you if I had a mind?"

Lady Emma was well pleased to be left quite alone. She would have been very sorry had Lord Henry joined her while her "dear friend" was beside her. But this he was careful not to do. Immediately taking her place, "I must be quick," he said, looking towards her chaperon, Lady Margaret: "I want to know where the works of your hands have been disposed."

"Indeed I do not know; but they are all mere feminine trifles, quite unsuited for your purchase."

"An injury to the charity as well as to me," he rejoined. "I shall buy nothing fashioned by any one else. Think again: surely there must be something——"

But just then the approach of Lady Margaret compelled him hastily to withdraw. The two ladies again made the tour of the stalls, pausing often to converse with their acquaintance, grouped together in little knots. Being on the verge of one of these, Lady Emma saw Lord Henry draw near, holding in his hand the identical sketch to obtain which Sir Aubrey had projected an expedition so foreign otherwise to his inclinations. She felt as though guilty of disappointing his purpose, and quite dreaded his discovering the fate which had befallen it.

"Why do you look so gravely on my success?" asked Lord Henry: "I know it is your work."

The lady who had it in charge had indeed given him a pretty intelligible hint to that effect.

"Yes, it is mine; but," she added, involuntarily, "I am sorry you have chanced to select it. A friend of mine, a relation, has taken a foolish fancy for it: it is in a manner bespoken."

"I am concerned for the lady's disappointment, but her right can hardly be as good as mine."

"Well," answered Lady Emma, becoming very nervous—for she had just caught sight of Sir Aubrey, advancing rapidly in search of his mother and herself—"at least there is no occasion for displaying it: it may lead to some impertinent inquiry. Pray give it into your servant's charge."

Love has an infinite variety of moods: Lord Henry's that morning was not that of obedience; he rather took delight in playing with a timid anxiety which he did not suppose to have any particular cause.

"You but little understand the value I attach to this treasure," he said, "if you imagine I could for a moment entrust it to menial custody."

Sir Aubrey now came up. His mother's eyes brightened; for, it being considerably beyond the time he had named, she had begun to entertain an undefined dread of disaster.

"You are late," said she: "what has detained you?"

"Every thing!" he replied, with unusual impatience. "I thought I should never be here."

She had been somewhat surprised when he told her of his intention of joining her. His extreme discomposure at not having been earlier in arriving was still more strange.

"The best is over, certainly," said she; "but it is still lively enough. We are in no hurry: we can very well wait till you have taken a survey."

"Sit down, then," said he, in his accustomed manner: "I will not detain you long."

Having led her to a seat, he approached Lady Emma, who kept as far apart as she could.

"You know why I came," he said, eagerly: "am I too late?"

"I am afraid you may be," she answered, unable wholly to conceal her agitation. "But," she added, endeavouring to turn it off playfully, "that need not affect your patronage of the charity. There are, perhaps, some few sketches not greatly inferior to it."

He looked seriously vexed, and replied, "I must look round—look every where."

But as he spoke he beheld the coveted prize in another's grasp, and stopped, with a strong expression both of surprise and resentment. Lord Henry,

observing him, was on his side struck with suspicion. "This is your *friend*, then," he said to Lady Emma, with a very poignant emphasis. She could not attempt an explanation—the situation was far too public; and thus, though really innocent of the slightest shade of coquetry, she stood exposed to a cross-fire of resentment on the part of her two suitors. Sir Aubrey cast upon her one look expressive of the deepest reproach, and proceeded to expend as he best might a sum befitting a man of liberality.

He soon returned to conduct the ladies to their carriage. Their drive thither had been highly agreeable: the return was very much the reverse. Both were silently dwelling on the same unpleasing subject. The one lost herself in conjectures as to what could so much have discomposed her darling son; the other, fully knowing the cause, pondered over it with much regret and no little anxiety.

CHAPTER X.

THE high in station are necessarily exposed to having every thing which befalls them seen, heard, told, and yet too often wrongly told. Before the end of the day the trifling incident relating to Lady Emma's drawing had become the foundation of sundry strange reports. A very curious and rather deaf dowager chanced to mistake the words "a picture" for "her picture;" and this not immaterial variation of the story speedily became current. It is true there were many persons assured by the testimony of their own eyes that it was no portrait, but a landscape; but that difficulty was easily got over —the fair artist had introduced her own likeness in peasant costume. The gossips were divided

in opinion as to which gentleman was the lawful proprietor of the sketch, some insisting that it was expressly designed for Sir Aubrey, from whom it had been most unjustifiably wrested by Lord Henry; others, that the latter well knew it was really intended for him; while a third party held themselves bound in candour to be certain of nothing but that the young lady had coquetted most shamefully with both her admirers.

Poor Lady Emma had soon the benefit of knowing how much discussion her adventure had undergone: the affectionate condolences of Miss Dallas apprised her of all. She carried her complaints from the false friend to the true.

"Is it not hard, Miss Mansfield, that this harmless act of mine should have given rise to so many absurd and ill-natured tales?"

Catherine's soothing reply was arrested on her lips. A shuffling sound announced an unusual visitor.

"Grandpapa!" exclaimed Lady Emma, in great though undefined alarm: "what can bring him here?"

As she spoke the door was thrown open, and

his Lordship, by the aid of his servant, advanced slowly into the room. Lady Emma rolled forward the most commodious chair, and then tremblingly retreated behind it; she really needed support. He sat for about a minute silent, and then said, authoritatively, "Come forward, Emma!"

She stood before him, accordingly, as one arraigned, though for what offence she was wholly ignorant. The Marquis opened the cause with austere dignity.

"You must, I apprehend, be well aware on what account I have made the painful exertion of coming up here."

"No, indeed, Grandpapa; I assure you I have not the least idea."

He then produced a note. "This," he said, impressively, "is from your cousin Sir Aubrey, and contains an apology, the second—yes, the second I have received within the last week, for his declining an invitation on my part. He declines—he declines, I must add, with no apparent excuse: 'regrets his inability'—very vague and unmeaning language to employ with me!"

"Dear Grandpapa," Lady Emma ventured to say, "Sir Aubrey could not mean to offend you."

"He has given me satisfaction hitherto," resumed his Lordship; "for which reason I am disposed to attribute his present conduct to some circumstance with which I am unacquainted. And therefore I came here to demand from you a most explicit answer on this point. Has there been any difference between you? Answer without evasion. This affair is much too important to be treated with girlish caprice."

"Indeed, Grandpapa, you are altogether mistaken. The case is not at all as you suppose. I like Sir Aubrey very much as a cousin, but—but there is no other relation between us."

The excess of the aged nobleman's surprise for a time suspended his power of speech; but when it was regained, his vehemence seriously alarmed his auditors. His exclamations were broken.

"This language is most extraordinary—most extraordinary! Are you well aware what you have said? You amaze me—you absolutely amaze me, Emma!"

Some minutes elapsed before he could speak coherently.

"Let me explain," he said, making a strong effort at self-command: "there has been as yet no formal demand on Sir Aubrey's part; but it is my decided opinion that you must have known the nature of his views."

"Of late, I must own, I have had some apprehensions."

"Apprehensions!" repeated the Marquis, losing his studied formality in his extreme displeasure: "what childish nonsense is this?"

But as he spoke some indistinct recollections began to arrange themselves in his mind. The half-forgotten paragraph, together with some significant hints dropped within the last few days by his daughter—Lady Arabella, who, most erroneously attributing the affronts she had received from Miss Dallas to the secret instigation of her niece, found in the stories now afloat abundant materials for vengeance—all flashed at once upon the Marquis; his whole frame shook with agitation.

"Will you answer me, Emma?" he said, with a

quivering voice: "what do you mean by 'apprehensions'? You were afraid of receiving an offer from your nearest kinsman: why, let me ask?"

"Because I could not have accepted it," she answered, in a very low but clear voice.

He looked fixedly at her, and said, "I have heard enough—a great deal more than enough." Then, pointedly averting his face, "You will have the goodness, Miss Mansfield," he proceeded, "to inform the Marchioness that it is my intention to leave town on Monday next. Her Ladyship will acquaint Lady Arabella, and give the necessary orders."

These injunctions delivered, his Lordship withdrew as he came, and Catherine, in fulfilment of his commands, could only stay to utter a few kind words. Lady Emma remained alone, in no little trouble. Her aunt, the Duchess, found her in a state of distress for which she feared the ostensible cause would hardly seem sufficient; but her Grace entered into it most warmly.

"Going now, my dearest child? Why this is

really monstrous tyranny! Lady Donnington's work, no doubt."

"No, indeed," interposed Lady Emma.

"But, my dear girl, the thing speaks for itself! Depend upon it, she is the prime mover."

"I assure you she has nothing whatever to do with it; the resolution was evidently suddenly formed in his own mind."

"Abominable selfishness, sacrificing the happiness of the young to some antiquated form! What can it signify whether he dozes away his hours in town or country? Change of place has really little or nothing to do with his comforts: to your enjoyments, my dear, it makes all the difference."

"It does indeed," sighed poor Lady Emma.

"The next two or three weeks are all for which I would condition; but just now it is really too hard! Does not Lord Donnington know that I entertain the Duke of —— on Wednesday next? Surely he must perceive that your presence is indispensable! Remind him of it; it may procure you a short reprieve at least. He ever thought highly of the respect due to royalty."

"It would be of no use," answered Lady Emma, dejectedly: "his purposes are not easily changed."

"Obstinacy is the common vice of age, no doubt, and was always his in particular—but it is most provoking! Nothing could have happened more unluckily: you will actually lose our projected quadrille!"

"As to that, if I lost no more I should not greatly care. Indeed, I had not yet made up my mind to taking part in it."

"You surprise me, my dear—the great attraction of the evening! I cannot, as patroness, allow it to be given up; yet, without you——"

"That can be of no importance: you will find many willing to take my place."

"But I had so set my heart upon seeing you as a Nereid! The style of the hair is so exquisitely becoming—in front carelessly put back, gathered in a knot behind, leaving two charming tresses floating on the shoulders. I studied the head of Thetis in the gallery, and showed it to Josephine: her happy genius caught the idea like magic. On going out, my first call was at Lady Daventry's, where we all met. The discus-

sion was rather too exciting. Lady Dalwinning was quite annoying—objecting to my suggestions about the robe. Happily every one else was with me, so she was at last obliged to yield. A pale shade of sea-green—extremely becoming to a delicate bloom like yours. It was easy to see the real cause of opposition: it will make her daughter's complexion show more sallow than ever. The poor girl will look like a fright, no doubt, *mais n'importe:* I could not allow your beauties to be obscured in compliment to another's defects. We talked over the ornaments: one single orient pearl upon the brow—that I am determined you shall have; but whether more wreathed round the head is a question; some incline to branches of coral. My dearest dear girl," she continued, tenderly passing her arm round her niece's neck, "I really cannot bear that you should be deprived of all this! You can hardly imagine what you will lose!"

"I confess," replied Lady Emma, "I do not much like the plan. Dancing in this manner in a public ball-room seems to me rather too much like theatric exhibition."

"Very fantastic objections, not to say positively arrogant!" replied the Duchess, with considerable warmth. "Those who take part in it may very justly ask, if they entertain no scruples, why should you?"

"Well, my dear Aunt, we need not debate the point. It is of little consequence what I might or might not have done a fortnight hence, since I am to leave town in two days."

Her Grace softened again.

"Ah, there it is!" said she, with a sigh: "leave town! positively sent into exile! Poor dear girl, you are indeed a martyr to parental caprice! But, *à propos*, my Emma"—assuming a rather more serious air—"I came this morning expressly to inquire—only this disagreeable news put it all out of my head—what it is that has got abroad respecting you. People talk about a picture, and a quarrel, and I do not know what nonsense else. What does it all mean, my dear? you can have no secrets from me, surely?"

"Why," replied Lady Emma, endeavouring to subdue the tremulousness of her voice, "it is really nothing; but the world is so ill-natured. It is

only that I sent a foolish little drawing to the bazaar the other day. I wish heartily I had never done any thing of the kind! This drawing, however, Sir Aubrey happened to see and commend. He is a great connoisseur, you know——"

"Very true, my dear," answered the Duchess, with a playful smile.

"I do not mean," interposed Lady Emma, hastily, "that he admired it with justice, but only that——"

"I understand very well, my dear. Go on."

"So, in short, after some talking, he determined to go there and purchase it, and——"

"Pardon me, Emma, but this picture—what was it? what did it represent? They pretend to say it was a likeness of yourself."

"So ridiculously—so shamefully untrue! It was nothing but a view, the sketch of an old tower belonging to our family."

"Was that all? There was no figure, my love?" looking at her inquiringly.

"Only an old fisherman mending his nets."

"That malicious Mrs. St. Ives!" said the Duchess, *sotto voce.* "Well, my dear, this pretty

drawing of yours was sent to Twickenham; and then what ensued?"

The investigation as it drew closer touched Lady Emma more sensibly.

"Nothing—really nothing worth mention," she said, hesitatingly: "only Sir Aubrey was rather late, and it was sold when he arrived."

"Ah, but who was the purchaser? that is the point," said the Duchess. She paused, but with such arch meaning that it was impossible entirely to decline reply.

"I think—I believe it was Lord Henry Beauchamp," Lady Emma answered, endeavouring to pronounce "the one loved name" in a tone of indifference.

"*Je m'en doutais bien*," said the Duchess, with a most significant smile.

"But it was quite accidental. I do not know by what unlucky chance he selected it: it had no name."

"Intuitive perception, no doubt: but pray what followed this bold deed? a quarrel—a conflict?"

"Oh, no, no! but it was altogether extremely

vexatious. I was sorry that Sir Aubrey should be disappointed, trifle as it was; and his mother takes every thing that vexes him so deeply to heart! And then, worst of all, these absurd and yet cruel falsehoods!"

"Never mind, my dear; such foolish tales soon die away, believe me. But I wish to take this opportunity of giving you a little—little hint, which, perhaps, I have deferred rather too long. This hero of your history—not Sir Aubrey, his part is but subordinate, but the other—I begin to fear that he has made something like an impression!"

"My dear Aunt," said Lady Emma, blushing deeply, "I thought you knew all."

"That depends, my dear, upon what 'all' means. I certainly knew that he pleased you, but so it is universally; there is nothing peculiar to you so far. For any thing beyond this—a husband, *pour parler franchement*—in that capacity I suppose nobody yet ever thought of him. All the world knows he has neither means nor inclination for marrying. So I could not, *mon enfant*, entertain any apprehensions on your behalf.

And being, as he is, so eminently agreeable a cavalier, one would not wish to repulse him without sufficient cause."

"If you did indeed think this was all," replied Lady Emma, sustained under her mournful surprise by just displeasure, "how could you suffer us to be so much together?"

"True, my dear girl, most true! I acknowledge it to my own reproach. If there is any thing a little wrong, I am certainly in some degree accountable for it. But I relied so much on your excellent understanding, and his high sense of honour! I considered it so certain that you would remember your respective positions."

"Explain yourself more clearly, I entreat," said Lady Emma, in a faint voice.

"Your circumstances as to fortune, my love, so directly opposed."

"Do you think that an obstacle?"

"*You* do not: no; I dare say, rather the other way," replied the Duchess, again smiling; "it is common enough with heiresses on their first entrance into life. Many a one, perhaps, but for parent or guardian, would gladly endow with her

abundance some favoured mortal, himself in the depths of destitution; but, happily, time comes in to correct the romantic error. As for the subject of our discourse, no one thinks more highly of him than I do: he is, beyond comparison, *the* man of the day, and, if differently placed, would be my especial choice for a dear niece—a daughter, if I had one. But, my Emma, we must argue the case as it is, not as it might be. In his actual position he cannot aspire to a union with you. I am persuaded he must be aware of this. He must know me better than to think I could sanction——"

"Indeed," replied Lady Emma, struggling hard to repress her tears, "I do not believe he thought differently from me. We both imagined——" here she became utterly unable to proceed.

"My dear girl," said the Duchess, "this is most distressing! The mischief seems deeper than I had apprehended. I shall never forgive my own imprudence! but tell me, at least, what has passed. It has not surely gone too far—nothing like a promise, I trust?"

Lady Emma commanded herself sufficiently to answer, "No."

"Then all is well," resumed her Grace, with a sigh of relief. "All will be well, soon, at least. A little time for reflection, my own child, and your tranquillity is restored."

That consolatory remark uttered, she was for a while silent, taking care not to look towards her niece. When she again spoke, it was in an unembarrassed tone.

"Do not suppose me to be Sir Aubrey's advocate—far from it, I assure you. We see these questions from different points of view. Lord Donnington holds it to be the greatest of all possible calamities that his estates and titles should pass from his own descendants. But nobody else thinks so; and, for my own part, I tell you candidly it is a matter of great satisfaction to me that you are not inclined to that match. I never could get on with any of your father's race, himself excepted. There is something decidedly singular in every one of them. Lady Margaret, no doubt, is an admirable personage in her way, but she has buried herself in that old dwelling of theirs till she is unfit to mingle with the rest of the world. All her notions breathe, as it were, of vaults and dungeons!

We never could have become intimate, had you chanced to adore her son as devoutly as she does herself."

Lady Emma still preserved silence: her Grace therefore continued her monologue.

"I am no friend to early marriages, unless particularly expedient. A hapless mother with a long train of daughters to bring on one after the other, may be excused if she does push the foremost into the gulf at once. She wants a footing for the poor things in the rear; but I could wish you, dearest, standing as you do alone and firm, to survey the ground before you. Marriage too often abridges the reign of beauty. Your dear mother never perfectly recovered her bloom after your birth. A languid grace she had indeed that was highly interesting; but it came much too soon! You may remember to have heard that we married on the same day. What a day! what a scene! She, lovely as Aurora, hardly eighteen; myself but just twenty; our two bridegrooms, handsome both—you can hardly judge what the Duke then was; every thing so joyous, so full of hope!"

The deep sigh here breathed touched Lady Emma, as the Duchess perceived. She took her niece's hand fondly, and continued, with the same air of tender melancholy,—

"Yes, my child, such is life; so fleeting its brightest hours! That day seems but as yesterday, yet nineteen years have elapsed; and, alas, what changes have they brought! It was a country wedding, as I hope, when your time comes, yours also will be. Depend upon it, there is no comparison. At the family seat you are secure of privacy, with no more of popular rejoicing than you may like to admit. Here in London there is no escaping insufferable annoyance: they crowd around you, impede your entrance and exit. I had full experience of it at the marriage of Isabel Mitford, which was entirely under my direction. Expressly to keep things quiet, I fixed on St. George's instead of our own church, but all in vain; there were far too many stranger spectators within, and before we could get out of the vestry the whole parish had congregated without. This would never do for you, nor could I myself endure it. I have it all ready-planned, as it shall one

lay take place at Beaulieu, for there it shall be: on that point my heart is fixed. The church being, you know, hardly a hundred yards from the gates, the procession arrives at once; no tedious delay. The tenantry—will you object to them, love?—they will rather expect to be allowed a glimpse, but it will be quite unlike a mere London mob——"

It was in vain: Lady Emma could not be brought to take any interest in the arrangement of her future espousals, since she was forbidden to place the object of her affections as the principal figure in the piece. The Duchess saw in her wandering glance that she was hopelessly abstracted, and arose.

"My dear child, I must leave you now. How shall I bear to be without you altogether? How dull and flat every thing will become! Well, we must not talk of it. Is there any thing I can yet do? What is to-day?"

"Saturday," replied Lady Emma, with a beating heart.

"Saturday! ah, true, and a grand night! You will accompany me?"

"I believe I may, as Sir Aubrey is not coming."

"Expect me, then, punctually, my dear," said her Grace as she departed.

It was almost more than her niece, as she now understood her position, had dared to hope. That opera-box had been the scene of many happy little discourses: might there be but *one* more—one at least!

She was there. Twice the door had opened only to inflict disappointment; but the third time, without the slightest movement of the head, she knew who came. But she betrayed no symptom of this: her whole soul was apparently riveted on the performance. Lord Henry was alarmed. What song, what dance had ever before had power to withhold her attention from him? There was always some slight involuntary token of welcome discernible only by himself. What could the change mean? His sentiment of jealousy with regard to Sir Aubrey had been that of a moment only; but could his hasty expressions on that occasion be remembered with displeasure? They had not met since. He drew near, in anxious, silent observation, as soon as he had exchanged

a few slight remarks with the Duchess. The *prima donna* was distinguished for tragic powers which that opera especially called forth; but Lady Emma, he knew, had been twice present at its representation: she was not likely to be profoundly affected a third time, yet she evidently had difficulty in restraining her tears. At first she shunned his gaze, but, making a visible effort, she at length turned towards him, and said, "I am ashamed of this weakness!"

"Without cause, surely," he replied: "many others share it."

"It is unusual with me; but I think I came rather predisposed. It is foolish—quite absurd——"

His eyes were now bent upon her with an eager anxiety, which still more disconcerted her. She could hardly command her voice in replying, "Only because I am going away very soon—at once."

"Leaving town now?"

"Yes; on Monday. It was suddenly settled."

He felt at once assured he was himself the cause.

"Where? To Donnington?"

"Yes; for six months at least."

"A place of all others," he rejoined, with a frown, "the most inaccessible! Not a house that I know within thirty or forty miles. The mines, perhaps, or manufactories——"

"No," said she, blushing to own that she so well understood him; "you could not—that is not an object for you——"

"My sole object," he replied, with unwonted impetuosity, "is to be near you!——"

Farther he proceeded not: there was a watchful observer. The powerful orchestra kept his words sacred from every ear but that to which they were addressed, but other symptoms gave sufficient intimation: her Grace saw how it was. With her own most winning smile she called for his attention, and for the remainder of the entertainment took care entirely to absorb it. Lady Emma gazed pensively around the house, unusually crowded that night. Many of her brightest compeers, she thought, directed glances towards that particular box. The character of her affection was that of fond confidence, yet a pang of fear did then seize on her heart. A six months' separa-

tion—would his constancy stand the test? She leaned back; all colour left her cheek. The Duchess took the alarm, and immediately found herself, quite overcome by the heat of the house, unable to remain any longer. In the act of departure Lord Henry's assiduities had been hitherto shared between the aunt and niece, but the former this night engrossed them entirely. She took his arm with gracious familiarity, consigning Lady Emma to the charge of a newly-arrived foreign nobleman. The arrangement was distasteful to both gentlemen. While the one bit the lip which was denied the utterance of a parting word, the other thought himself much aggrieved by having to act as esquire to a damsel who to him seemed remarkable for nothing but utter lifelessness of look and manner.

One other glimpse of each other the lovers had in the park next day; but again her Grace showed herself determined to atone by excess of vigilance for all previous negligence. In vain did Lord Henry prolong to the utmost his accustomed pause beside the carriage; the fair person of the guardian was steadily interposed: and

when at last, disappointed and angry he rode on, Lady Emma, conscious of the *surveillance* to which she was now subjected, dared not so much as indulge herself with gazing after his receding figure.

END OF VOL. I.

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